

Art History Supplement

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EDITORIAL

IN the time of the original calling for papers, two months ago, I was not expecting, indeed, to accumulate such papers of high standards. But also to review, papers, and thus authors, that take seriously into consideration the “human factor” in the construction and the shaping of history and art history, or history of conservation, in the case of our current issue. Above all, I would like to thank all contributors of current issue, along with the co-editor Annamaria Ducci for her personal interest and support; without which I would never have managed to find the courage to continue working towards Art Histories Society and *Art History Supplement*.

In the first article of our 3.2 issue, “The Art History Guild”, Victoria H.F. Scott, one of the leading personalities of the emerging The Art History Guild, treats the notions of conservation and restoration in a less literal way, from that of the original call for papers, asking the “restoration” of the profession of art historian everywhere in the world. In addition, while this “paper” has been, indeed, widely read and discussed, and has caused reactions and responses, this is its first formal presentation. Victoria H.F. Scott is taking actions for the development, thus shaping, of art history, globally, starting from the United States. We all, from this point of view, are still watching or taking part, actively or passively, in an art history in the making. “Art is the best part of life and—at least theoretically—it, *and art history*, belong to everyone.” Art history is definitely for everyone, I would strongly support; but not to be mistaken with its academic practice.

Anthony Spagnol, Principal conservator in the Paintings Department of the Conservation Division, and Joseph Schirò, Head of Conservation, both at Heritage Malta, are the authors of our second article. They present in their joint paper “The Malta Story”, for the first time, the



actions of the historian and sculptor Antonio Sciortino (1879-1947) and of Vincenzo Bonello (1891–1969), amongst others, preserving the national patrimony and other works of art in Malta during the World War II.

Carlo Cussetti (1866-1949) is the main theme of the paper of Paolo San Martino, from Regione Piemonte – Division of Culture. By whom, Cussetti is being presented as the man who actively took part in the “academic” elevation of the profession of art restorer / conservator, through his social and cultural cycle and his erudition.

The next contribution to *Art History Supplement* comes from Noémie Etienne, currently at New York University (CNRS-NYU), a specialist in material art history. Her article, “From wall to museum. Material and Symbolic Transformation of Paintings in Paris around 1775,” examines in a set date and place of Paris before the French Revolution, the uses of “conservation” and “restoration”, two terms used, here, alternately, as key factors to the creation of heritage; “a corpus of objects united to have an impact in the future.”

In the last entry of current issue, Anneli Randla with Hilikka Hiiop, Department of Conservation, Estonian Academy of Arts, presents us the paradigm of Viktor Filatov (1918–2009), a Soviet Russian conservator, under the discourse of Cesare Brandi's principle of reversibility of a conservation and the aim of historicising the outcome of a conservation or restoration.

Reviews from “Books received” from current or previous issue, are always welcome. More, our next issue will be dedicated to histories, and thus people, of museology. For more information, visit our website, at www.arths.org.uk.

The editor



THE ART HISTORY GUILD, BY VICTORIA H.F. SCOTT

Art history in America is underdeveloped and the root of the problem is structural. The College Art Association's membership is 14,000, only 4200 of which are art historians, and 700 of those are graduate students. By establishing an independent body, just for art historians—The Art History Guild (AHG)—members could concentrate on improving key issues such as the abolition of adjuncting, quadrupling the lines, raising salaries, collecting statistics, setting policies to improve and monitor working conditions, and truly advocating on behalf of art historians at every stage of their careers. With a more solid and focused organization, art history in this country could grow by leaps and bounds, bringing it more in line with other comparable disciplines. With better working conditions would come better scholarship, perhaps even a greater generalized understanding of the centrality of art and culture for quality of life in America, and everywhere else, too.

Il nous faut de l'audace, et encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace.

Georges Jacques Danton

Colleges and universities have been under attack for some time and at an accelerated pace since 9/11, and even more so since the financial crisis of 2008. Liberal arts colleges, traditionally the heart of the American higher education system have suffered the worst and their numbers are dropping.¹ Broadly speaking the values humanism represents are in decline everywhere and for whatever reason humanists are unable to convincingly explain what they do all day and why it is important or relevant to the public. Post-structuralism and postmodernism are very much to blame for the status quo, but my opening point is that the fight for the university is, in its heart of hearts, a fight for the humanities, because without the humanities universities are merely professional or technical schools. Art history is the most vulnerable discipline within the humanities, and so now, more than

* This essay is dedicated to my students.

¹ Scott Jashick, "Liberal Arts Colleges Disappearing," *Inside Higher Education* October 11, 2012
<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/10/11/study-finds-liberal-arts-colleges-are-disappearing> Consulted November 28, 2012.

ever before, we need a robust and vigorous defence of the significance and special role of art and art history in academia and society at large. One might imagine that the College Art Association would jump at the opportunity to defend art history and the humanities, thereby raising the profile and expanding the influence of the discipline. However, in fact that is not the case. Now it is up to younger scholars to address the problem. What we need to do is establish a new institution just for art historians.

In 1982 Henri Zerner wrote in the *Art Journal* that art history needed to be “re-examined, rethought, and restructured” in order to rescue it from its “deteriorated” state as an “uninspired professional routine, feeding a busy academic machine in the service of a dominant ideology [and] deeply involved with the market, which determines the object of its studies.”² Nothing much has changed since Zerner wrote these lines. If anything the problems have become more exaggerated—at least in America.

The crisis is, just as Zerner pointed out, first and foremost about the way the discipline is organized. However, the professional structure of art history cannot be separated from its method and content. This latest phase of the ongoing crisis in art history stems from the way we conceive of our calling as art historians, the way we decide to carry that mission out, and what we really think we deserve to be paid in relation to say, high school teachers or university administrators. In other words, what we think art history’s purpose is, and how we value that work.

The argument one hears again and again is that the miserable state of the discipline is a coefficient of what the market will bear and that the College Art Association is helpless to improve the situation because they cannot control the fact that there is just not much interest in or need for art history, and therefore not that much need for art historians. And let’s not forget the famous “surplus” of PhDs argument: that there are simply too many PhDs out there watering down an already weak market.

² Henri Zerner, “Editor’s Statement: the Crisis in the Discipline,” *Art Journal* 42, 4 (1982): 279.

If I could carve the next sentences in a wall I would. It is not that there are too many PhDs in art history or the humanities for that matter. It is rather that substandard and exploitative working conditions verging on slavery have become normalized. If course loads were reasonable, if professors were expected to teach a 2-3 class load on the outside, and class sizes were capped at 35 everywhere there would not be enough PhDs to go round. There is not a surplus of art history PhDs. *There is a shortage of art history PhDs.*

“That is ridiculous!” you might be thinking to yourself, dear reader. “How many art historians are there in America anyway?” The collection of statistics should not be left to administrators, who obviously have their own agendas. We cannot make the numbers work for us if we do not even know what they are or have access to them. The College Art Association has collected statistics on the discipline and their membership but they are not available on the website. They should be. To understand the big picture we need to be able to share and analyze statistics across disciplines.

The College Art Association’s membership is 14,000 but only 4200 are art historians, and of those 4200 art historians, 700 are graduate students.³ The rest of the College Art Association’s membership is mostly made up of artists, approximately one third, then gallerists, publishers, and dealers. That is not to say there are *only* 3500 art historians working in America, only that there are 3500 “registered” art historians we could say. Why “registered”? Many art historians do not join the College Art Association as they think it is expensive and irrelevant. This means that there are not even reliable statistics about how many art historians there are in America. 3500 is an estimate: 3500 art historians for a population of 314 million. Humanities majors account for only 12% of recent graduates, of which 0.2% have art history degrees (if we doubled the numbers we would be 0.4%. Not even a whole percentage point!).⁴ Does that number seem small? Does

³ I have sent three emails to the College Art Association requesting verification of these numbers and they have not yet responded.

⁴ “According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), humanities majors account for about 12 percent of recent graduates, and art history majors are so rare they’re lost in the noise. They account for less than 0.2 percent of working adults with college degrees, a number that is probably about right for recent graduates, too. Yet somehow art history has become

that number seem small considering that there are 4495 colleges and universities in the U.S.⁵ Of the 4495 colleges and universities in America, 854 have Fine Arts programs while *only 316 have art history departments*, out of which, approximately 92 offer doctoral programs.⁶

How many art historians should there be in North America? How many art historians should there be in the world? Maybe there are already too many! What about the trickle-down theory of American art history? Shouldn't we let the market take care of it? Because the market is working so brilliantly right now in every other respect. "Why would you want to expand art history?" one of my favorite art historians asked me: "Art historians are so awful." It is true. Maybe art historians would be nicer if there were more jobs. It is unlikely, but who cares? Some of us are just crazy enough to think, like the current French government, that art history should be part of all education from kindergarten through to grade twelve and beyond.⁷ Nice or not nice, the upshot of more gainfully employed art historians would be a better-generalized understanding of the centrality of art and culture for quality of life in North America and everywhere else too. Moreover, that would be no bad thing.

My second point here is that art history in America is underdeveloped. Nothing is going to change under the current leadership at the College Art Association so it is time to establish a more effective organization specifically for art historians. Germany has 2800 art historians, for a population of 82 million, while the United

the go-to example for people bemoaning the state of higher education." Virginia Postrel, "How Art History Majors Power the U.S. Economy," *Bloomberg View* Jan 5, 2012. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-01-06/postrel-how-art-history-majors-power-the-u-s.html>. Consulted November 28, 2012.

⁵ National Center for Education Statistics, *Degree-Granting Institutions and Branches, by Type and Control of Institution and State of Jurisdiction, 2009-10* (September 2010). Retrieved December 1, 2011. Cited in the Education in the United States Wikipedia entry. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_the_United_States#cite_note-58. Consulted November 28, 2012.

⁶ GradSchools.com <http://www.gradschools.com/search-programs/term-art/art-architecture>. Consulted November 28, 2012.

⁷ <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/budget/plf2013/a0252-tii.asp> Consulted November 28, 2012.



Kingdom has 1500 for a population of 63 million.⁸ That works out to about 30 art historians per 1 million in Germany and England, in comparison to 11 in the United States. If we use Germany and England as models theoretically the United States should have 9420 art historians. That is, of course, if one agrees that 30 parts per a million is enough. The number of art historians currently working in America needs to be tripled, the available lines need to be tripled. That is just to achieve parity. If one were going to be truly American about this one would quadruple the lines. That would bring the number up to 14,000. That number is, incidentally, about half the size of the membership of the Modern Language Association.⁹ And they cannot be adjunct positions either. They have to be proper jobs, with full benefits, indexed pensions, twelve-month contracts, and job stability: tenure-track jobs. We could be the first discipline in the humanities to abolish adjuncting and nine-month contracts. Art history could be a model for all the other humanities, and even the sciences.

The argument will be made that the quality of scholarship will decline as the numbers increase, but I am not claiming that the sum of all of these new art historians will amount to anything like a standing army of Johann Joachim Winckelmanns (although...*who knows!?*). An awkward period is to be expected with the understanding that in the end more, and more open competition ultimately leads to better work *always*. That said it is exactly because I take art history so seriously that I am able to appreciate that art history is not so serious. It is not brain surgery for instance. If someone forgets the date of the Arena Chapel, nobody dies. That does not mean that the stakes are not high in art history. They are, but for different reasons (which I will come back to later). The cultivation of excellent undergraduate students will be

⁸ The statistics for Germany are available on their “Wir über uns” page, <http://www.kunsthistoriker.org/wirueberuns.html>, and the numbers for England can be accessed on the “About” page on the Association of Art Historians website. <http://www.aah.org.uk/about>. Consulted November 28, 2012.

⁹ This number comes from a twitter exchange with Michael Bérubé.

essential. Mentoring large groups of tyros would have to be an important component of the twenty-five year strategy.¹⁰

It is in North American art historians' best interests to set up their own professional body as England and Germany have. In England there is the Association of Art Historians, and in Germany the Verband Deutsche Kunsthistoriker. It will have to be set up by untenured junior scholars and adjuncts. Senior and/or tenured scholars, with a few exceptions, do not care. There is nothing at stake for them. Generally speaking, they have no understanding of how things work on the ground level any more. When they left school, it is likely they did so without incurring the kind of debt that is now common, even among those of us who were lucky enough to get funding.

Having our own association is important because despite what one might imagine artists and art historians do not actually have very much in common. Art historians are very influential within the College Art Association but on the ground in rural art departments, where most art historians work, artists have the upper hand. Moreover, artists, no matter how well intentioned, do not understand how things work in art history. Any contemporary art historian can tell you that working with artists is the best thing in the entire universe but having an artist for a departmental chair can be less exhilarating.

Pressured by deans to offer big classes that fulfil the general arts requirements, artists often pass the buck to art historians who are then forced to teach some version of a mindless art appreciation class until their lungs burst.¹¹ Because often in these kinds of merged

¹⁰ We could aim for something radical like upping the numbers from 0.2% of all recent humanities majors to 1% (which would still be 5 times the current number).

¹¹ I am not claiming that working conditions for artists in America are good. They are not, and they are often paid even less than art historians are. Though it must be said that their class sizes are almost always smaller. Except for those art appreciation classes, which they are also sometimes required to teach. There are no statistics available about the numbers of artists teaching in the US, but my hunch is that there are more of them than art historians are. This hunch is based on the fact that there are many more art departments than art history departments, and within those art

departments art historians work alone, or with one or two other art historians if they are lucky, they must accept the terms that have been “offered” to them. Inevitably, the working conditions for these isolated art historians are bad. With distinct professional associations, artists and art historians would then be free to take up the leading issues of their respective fields.

Art historians could, for example, focus on getting more majors programs up and running across the country, abolishing adjuncting and nine-month contracts, changing graduate and postdoctoral stipends to salaries, raising salaries so that they are comparable to other arts disciplines, securing benefits, collecting accurate statistics, getting policies in place to improve and monitor working conditions, and advocating on behalf of art historians at every stage of their careers, not just in America, but everywhere, both inside and outside academia. This new organization would also strive for greater transparency. European colleagues might be surprised to learn that in addition to earning less than high school teachers—who make, on average 53,230 a year in America—art historians stateside have to pay to view the job ads listed on the College Art Association website.¹² You cannot look at the ads unless you take out a membership. One year I even had the privilege of paying to apply for a job (in California of course)!

Applications for jobs should never be made through the College Art Association website. Applying for a job is a private matter and this kind of information should be off limits to any kind of third party, especially employees of the College Art Association who might be tempted to try to direct or influence the proceedings. A practice that is not unheard of in American academia. As you have seen, art history is a very small village and news travels quickly. As it currently stands, the College Art Association is in conflict of interest, because as colleges, universities, and museums pay the College Art Association to advertise it is unlikely the organization would criticize the schools and other

departments, or at least the ones I have known, art historians tend to be in the minority.

¹² Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/high-school-teachers.htm>. Consulted November 28, 2012.

institutions upon which it depends for revenue. In addition, make no mistake about it the College Art Association is a business. There is not just a lot at stake morally and ethically in the future of the discipline, there is a lot at stake financially. Artists and art historians might be surprised to learn that the College Art Association has an annual budget of 1.9 million dollars.¹³

Since 2008, the crisis has been used as an excuse to attack the arts and humanities everywhere this has led to increasingly worsening working conditions for the majority of art historians and the College Art Association has not adequately addressed these problems. The impoverished state of art historical scholarship in America is directly linked to the impoverishment of the majority of art historians. In other words, the lacklustre *ESPRIT DE CORPS* of the whole North American operation is attributable to the College Art Association's inability to set standards regarding working conditions and their complete lack of concern for the employment status of adjuncts, not to mention the effects this has on undergraduate students who are the very future of the discipline.

The College Art Association sanctions problems by ignoring them. They make the situation worse because they have no vision for a different future. They don't want to track the problems or get the statistics right, because they do not want to know and they do not want anyone else to know either. This is not how you build a discipline. This is how you destroy a discipline. Let me be clear: the objective is not to politicize art history. Art history is already political. The objective is to change the professional organizational structure, and the whole discipline in truth, in order to transform art history everywhere into something more meaningful and more inspiring, something more accessible and more relevant to society at large, because right now it is *not* meaningful, inspiring, accessible, or relevant to many people, not even to the majority of art historians.

¹³ Corinna Kirsch, "Creepster Alert! College Art Association Sells Members' Personal Information." <http://www.artfagcity.com/2012/05/18/creepster-alert-college-art-association-sells-members-personal-information/>. Consulted November 28, 2012.

Not only should art history *be* democratic in spirit, purpose, and method, it has to be *seen to be* democratic in spirit, purpose, and method. Better working conditions would mean better scholarship, happier graduate students and scholars, and more informed and better educated and more confident professors and students at every level. It would mean the emergence of a strong and diverse discipline that was truly generous, open, and forward looking, productive, and god forbid, even *joyful*, rather than the continuation of one that was petty, corrupt, insecure, sclerotic, and opaque.

I propose we model the new organization on the Modern Language Association. Membership would be gratis—at least at the beginning, 70% of us are adjuncts, and I do not think it is right to burden adjuncts with fees for anything right now—and it would be an international organization. It would have its own newspaper and a journal (with articles written by art historians!), job listings would be free and available to everyone and there would be an annual conference that would *not* be a job market. Institutions would be encouraged to fill positions in state first. In fact, there would be university, city, state, and regional chapters. Interviewing people in public halls and hotel rooms, a practice that has been sanctioned by the College Art Association for years is gross, unethical, and embarrassing (I cannot believe I have to point this out). A new solution and an earlier schedule for the art history job market have to be set up post-haste. Every year there should be a deadline by which schools are expected to announce their new hires publicly. With a focused organization, art history could grow exponentially. It could even become a model for other fields within the humanities.

Which brings us back to the question of art history's crisis. It has become clear to emerging scholars that the discipline, at least in North America, needs to regroup. The recent pressure on art history to justify its existence and to explain its "usefulness" in a market economy has resulted in endless blah blah about the importance of visual literacy. Strapped for cash, the natural focus of the discipline has been bent in the direction of fields with more money: sociology,

neuroscience, anthropology, and more recently geography. At the same time everywhere in America and England art history departments are being merged with history, philosophy, communication, media and film studies departments.¹⁴ The rise of visual studies in North America and England, and *Bildwissenschaft* in Germany, have benefited from this state of affairs, however the enthusiasm finally appears to be subsiding as it is becoming obvious that “the potential of the multidisciplinary image-science remains largely unfulfilled.”¹⁵ It is as good a time as any to reset the clock. After all, a crisis is also an opportunity, as everyone in America should know by now.

To conclude: as scholars we need to be willing to think ambitiously and answer questions about what art history means outside academia, and how art history connects to the welfare of society at large. Questions like: “What is art history for?” and “Why does it matter?” are important, but we should also be asking: “*Who* is art history for?” The author Penelope Fitzgerald once observed that: “The world will not be right till poetry is pronounced to be life itself, our own lives but shadows and poor imitations.”¹⁶ Art is the best part of life and—at least theoretically—it, *and art history*, belong to everyone.

St John’s Newfoundland 2013

¹⁴ There are many examples as, most recently, the art history department at the University of Essex was merged with the department of philosophy, and new hires have been called off because of lack of students. In addition, that department, may I point out, had a stellar reputation, in terms of research. So even if your departments scores well on the Research Assessment Exercise (better known in England as the RAE), it will not save you.

¹⁵ See the upcoming conference: *Art History and Bildwissenschaft* (Brno, 28-29 March 2013) <http://arthist.net/archive/4244>. Consulted November 28, 2012.

¹⁶ Cited in Jeremy Adler’s article “Novalis and Philo-Sophie,” *TLS* 5481, April 16 2008, 3.

THE MALTA STORY, BY ANTHONY SPAGNOL AND JOSEPH SCHIRÒ

The article is about one of the biggest man-made disasters that severely threatened the national patrimony and other works of art in Malta which was World War II. This scenario was common to other countries; however, Malta being very small, space has always been very precious. Consequently, the safeguarding of such works, some of which were of world importance, had to be manoeuvred with limited facilities and means, and not without repercussions. The safekeeping of the national patrimony was entrusted to the Museums Department who had to take urgent care of the restoration of hundreds of works of art that had been damaged. This work was carried out by a small nucleus of people headed by Antonio Sciortino, Curator of the Fine Arts Section during the war years. Most of these restorers were actually artists and had no formal training in the conservation and restoration of works of art. The restoration techniques employed were largely based on empirical methods, and although by today's standards they may be criticized for their methods from people sitting in the comfort of an armchair, however they managed to save hundreds of paintings from certain destruction notwithstanding the limited human resources, the lack of facilities and materials, inadequate storage facilities, and lack of financial backing. All this was happening in a war scenario with bombs raining down, with destruction all around and hunger being the order of the day.

(Note. The Malta Story is a reference to a 1953 war film about Malta's heroic air defence starring Alec Guinness and Jack Hawkins and Anthony Steel).

During World War Two, Malta was seriously affected by the Axis bombing between 1940 and 1943. Amid the widespread destruction, the national artistic patrimony suffered directly from aerial attacks and so emergency measures had to be taken to remove, store and conserve this patrimony. This scenario was not exclusive to Malta. In other countries, priceless works of art were destroyed and many sacred and historic buildings razed to the ground.

The availability of large storage places for movable works of art was perhaps less problematic abroad than in Malta. Maltese authorities complained several times about the poor conditions in which important works of art had been stored. In other countries such as Austria and Germany use was made of salt mines, unused mines and specially built

bunkers.¹ In the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Rembrandt's *Nightwatch* was rolled up and transported to safety.² The Tate Gallery in London used nearby underground stations and private country houses. In the case of paintings that were considered too large to move to safety, these were walled up *in situ* with bricks while large sculptural works and other paintings were accommodated in the basement of the same building.³ The British Museum followed a policy of decentralization, depositing its treasures in a variety of depositories, following its bad experience during WWI when many artifacts were deposited in the London Underground. These had suffered badly from a damp and overheated environment, so the Museum Authorities took all precautions to condition the ambient air of the storage places within safe limits. The Trustees of the British Museum had, before the declaration of war in September 1939, published a booklet entitled 'Air-raid Precautions in Museums, Picture Galleries and Libraries.' In fact, after World War Two all artifacts were returned to the Museum in perfect condition.⁴ Some of the above safety measures were in fact adopted in Malta.

The responsibility for the protection of the Maltese national patrimony during the War years belonged to the National Museum. However, the sheer quantity of works of art, mainly paintings, to be safeguarded and restored was far beyond what this institution could actually manage. This was due to limited human resources, lack of facilities and

¹ Gattini, Andrea, 'Restitution by Russia of Works of Art removed from German Territory at the end of the Second World War' in *European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 7 (1996) No. 1; <http://www.ejil.org/journal/Vol7/No1/art4.html> (14 December 2012); *Art Treasures from the Vienna Collections, Lent by the Austrian Government*, Exhibition Catalogue (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1949) <http://www.nga.gov/past/data/exh103.htm> (17 January 2013).

² Nicholas Lynn, H., 'Nazi Confiscation and Acquisition of Art in World War II' from Proceedings of the International Conference, in *Mapping Europe: Fate of Looted Cultural Valuables in the Third Millennium*, (Moscow, 1011 April 2000); <http://www.libfl.ru/restitution/conf/lynn.html> (19 February 2013).

³ Archives of the Tate, London; <http://www2.tate.org.uk/archive/journeys/historyhtml/war.htm> (19 February 2013).

⁴ Plenderleith, Harold, J., *The Preservation of Antiquities*, (London, The Museums, Association, 1998), pp.129, 132.

materials, and more importantly inadequate storage facilities. The places available for storage included the Museum's basement, two rock shelters, one in Valletta and another in the northern part of the Malta and two of the Governor's country palaces. Rock shelters however were not the ideal places to store works of art and the museum personnel made sure that the authorities were aware that although they were safe from enemy bombs, the works of art were subjected to environmental agents of deterioration. Lack of financial backing was also another major concern. This situation can only be understood in the context of war, when art conservation was surely not a top priority. Moreover, some non-governmental institutions, especially the Church, and individuals, requested direct help or advice from the Museum authorities to preserve or restore their works. This situation was probably also common to other major museums in European cities. The British Museum was sought for advice and consultation, from national and provincial museums, from English cathedrals, educational institutions and universities.⁵



FIGURE 1 THE INNER PART OF ONE OF THE ROCK SHELTERS NAMED HOULTON'S GARAGE SHELTER IN VALLETTA.

⁵ Plenderleith, Harold, J., *The Preservation of Antiquities*, (London, The Museums, Association, 1998), pp.129, 132.

World War Two was definitely one of the worst experiences of suffering and hardship for entire nations in the twentieth century. Malta was no exception. Over a period of two and a half years, there were over 3,300 air raid alerts with more than 14,000 tons of bombs being dropped.⁶ Thousands found themselves homeless, with a total of 35,000 homes destroyed.⁷ At the end of the War, refugees wanted to return to their towns and villages to settle anew. Poverty was at its worst. Most were, understandably, only interested in reconstruction. Priority was given to the most practical issues. The Maltese people had far more serious concerns than the salvage of the national artistic patrimony. Historical considerations were, in most cases, put aside.⁸ Notwithstanding, in Malta, immediate action was taken to recover, and restore, all those works that had been damaged.



FIGURE 2 THE GRANDMASTER'S PALACE DINING ROOM, VALLETTA. IT CAN BE OBSERVED THAT THE PAINTINGS' DECORATIVE FRAMES WERE LEFT IN SITU.

⁶ Zarb-Dimech Anthony, *Taking Cover: A history of air-raid shelters Malta: 1940–1943*, Charles J. Boffa ed. (Malta: 2001), p.7

⁷ Cassar Charles, *A Concise History of Malta*, (Malta: Mireva Publications, 2000), p.225

⁸ Verbal communication by Dominic Cutajar, former Curator of Fine Arts, and Architect Michael Ellul, former Head of the Antiquities Section

Most of the work was carried out under extremely difficult conditions by Maltese artists who doubled as restorers. Many of them had studied in Rome⁹ and therefore were possibly exposed to conservation and restoration practices which by then were gaining ground towards a more scientific approach. Others had attended short courses in Italy or had direct contact with Italian restorers. Up to 1937 these artist-restorers had been guided by Vincenzo Bonello (1891–1969), a renowned Maltese historian and restorer, and later by Antonio Sciortino (1879–1947), both former curators of the Fine Arts Section of the National Museum. Although the latter was not a restorer, one may presume that he had been exposed to conservation and restoration practice and ethics from his years as a student and later sculptor in Rome, as well as a teacher of sculpture at the British Academy of Arts of which he became Director around 1911.¹⁰

Past practices in conservation and restoration of works of art in Malta are not looked upon positively by contemporary society, especially today when Malta boasts highly qualified academically-trained conservator-restorers working with state-of-the-art equipment. While professional conservators are justly seeking to establish high standards of conservation methods, it is not right however to judge past restoration methods by contemporary standards.

In mid-nineteenth-century colonial Malta, the distinction between conservation and restoration was blurred. This situation was however common also to other countries. The restorer was just beginning to gain an independent personality from that of the artist. However, this brought with it serious abuses. Many restorers wanted to show their ability by embarking on heavy and very risky interventions including the transfer of paintings on to a new support. It was the time when empirical methods were widely experimented with, and restorers had many secret formulae which they kept to themselves. This period has been described as ‘the romantic period of restoration’, when restorers

⁹ Vella, Dennis, *Maltese Artists in Rome, 1930–1940* Vol. 1, (Unpublished Master’s thesis, University of Malta, 1999).

¹⁰ Buhagiar, Helene, *Antonio Sciortino*, Exhibition Catalogue (Malta: Allied Malta Newspapers, 1947), p.23.

favoured coloured glazes and extensive over-painting, in order to present the artefact in a state where time had left very little effect.¹¹

It was not until the first half of the twentieth century that conservation began to be internationally defined, notably through adopting the *Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments*, at the first International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, under the auspices of the League of Nations, in Athens in 1931.

‘Conservation’ was defined as addressing deterioration processes of the material which it seeks to arrest, and thus aims to prolong the life of the artefact. It does not attempt to replace what is lost. On the other hand, any intervention aimed at recreating the image, came to be considered as ‘restoration’. This includes over-painting, retouching and reintegration. In general, restoration was considered a craft. Anyone whose work was somehow related to painting, carving, woodworking, statuary or gilding would have felt fit to embark, and was actually engaged, on restoration projects. Restoration work of considerable importance was entrusted to well-established artists. Two important Maltese artists, Giuseppe Calì (1846–1930) and Lazzaro Pisani (1854–1932) were reputed to have intervened directly on works of art besides also being consulted to give their advice on restoration.¹² The aim behind any intervention was intended to restore the artefact to its original state. Moreover, the intervention was sometimes not simply limited to repair the damage but also to ‘enhance’ the artefact according to the artist-restorer’s personal tastes. This resulted in over-painting, modification and invention, and sometimes obliteration of substantial parts of the artefact. The truth is that no intervention can

¹¹ Coremans, Paul, ‘Scientific Research and the Restoration of Paintings,’ in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996), p.433.

¹² Buhagiar, Mario, ‘Xogħolijiet ta’ Arti w Artigjanat fil-Knisja ta’ San Ġorġ’, in *Il-Knisja Parrokkjalita’ San Ġorġ Hal Qormi: Erba’ Sekli ta’ Storja*, Joseph F. Grima ed., (Tarxien: Eagle Press, 1984), pp.60, 64.

ever re-establish the original state of an artefact. It can only establish the present state of the original material.¹³

In the foreword to the 1864 reprint of *'Vita Del Cavalier Calabrese Mattia Preti'* by Bernardo De Domenici, the *Società Maltese delle Arti* stated that the intervention on the vault paintings by Mattia Preti (1613–99) in St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, which was soon to begin, should focus primarily on the preservation and conservation of the paintings to avoid further deterioration. The *Società* also declared that the practice of over-painting should be avoided since there was the risk that the restorer could easily impose his personal tastes.¹⁴

The perception towards new diverging approaches in conservation and restoration by Camillo Boito (1836–1914) in Italy, Gilbert Scott (1811–78), in England and Ludovic Vitet (1802–73) in France¹⁵ must have somehow reached our islands which in several fields were actually up to date with the latest developments, and not as provincial as might appear. The father of the above-mentioned Giuseppe Cali, Raffaele, was reputed to be a very good restorer as he was conscious not to create any damage to the original.¹⁶ However, the appeal by the *Società Maltese delle Arti* was ignored as large parts of the vault were heavily over-painted by Carlo Ignazio Cortis (1826–1900). This artist, who had just returned to Malta with letters of recommendation by Tommaso Minardi (1787–1871), would have felt honoured to embark on such a vast and important project although whether he possessed any knowledge of conservation and restoration is unknown.¹⁷ However, Cortis was obliged to act on what was earlier established by Prof. Nicolo Consoni (1814–84), an advisor with the *Accademia Romana di S. Luca*.

¹³ Philippot, Paul, 'Restoration from the Perspective of the Humanities', in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996), p.373.

¹⁴ Vella, Stephanie, *Vincenzo Bonello as a Pioneer in Maltese Art History and Criticism*, (Unpublished Bachelor's dissertation, University of Malta, 1997), p.58.

¹⁵ Cefai Shirley, 'Theory of Restoration' (Unpublished lecture notes, MCR, Malta, 2000).

¹⁶ Fiorentino Emmanuel & Grasso, Louis A., *Giuseppe Cali 1846–1930* (Malta: Said International Ltd, 1991), p.19, fn.10.

¹⁷ *Archivium Melitense*, VII, 3, 1924, p.63.

The Governor of Malta had requested Consoni to specify the type of intervention needed for the restoration of the vault. But Consoni did not understand the type of damage that was causing the painting to fade and consequently proposed what Cortis has, instead, since been cursed for – over-painting.¹⁸

A fresh attitude in conservation and restoration was proposed in 1920 by the newly-appointed Inspector of Works of Art, Vincenzo Bonello. Bonello's urge to update himself on new restoration techniques and museum organization, led him in 1935 to visit various important museums in Italy, where he had meetings with directors and other experts in the field of restoration. He proceeded on this tour at his own expense.¹⁹ He was considered as 'one of our best art experts and restorer', a statement made by Sir Hannibal Scicluna, Acting Director of Museums, to the Secretary to Government, when Bonello offered his services to the Government.²⁰



FIGURE 3 VINCENZO BONELLO RESTORING A SOFFIT PAINTING 'ECCE HOMO' BY MATTIA PRETI, FROM THE CEILING OF THE ORATORY OF ST. JOHN'S CO-CATHEDRAL, VALLETTA.

¹⁸ N[ational]L[ibrary]M[alta] Misc 461. Monsignor Pace Forno .

¹⁹ N[ational]A[rchives]M[alta]–CSG 1/ 1839/1937.

²⁰ NAM–CSG 1/ 6888/1943.

Bonello's new approach can be seen in the methodology that he employed in 1920 when he intervened on the vault paintings in St John's – certainly the most important and prestigious public work of art in Malta.²¹ The actual intervention did not begin until Bonello compiled a study of the work which was to be carried out and after consultations with renowned foreign restorers and chemists. The nature of white stains on the pictorial layers was identified as Potassium nitrate. Tests were subsequently carried out to remove the white stains as they were considered a potent agent of deterioration.²² The result of the treatment was evaluated over a long period of time, while photographic documentation was also carried out.

Bonello's harsh criticism on the overpainting of the vault, shows that he was against this practice. In a letter sent to the Director of the School of Arts, Bonello stressed the fact that it is not the artistic ability that counts in the training of restorers, but '...chemistry, literary culture, mechanical ability and, above all, the keen, passionate and thorough knowledge of all that pertains the old master'.²³

²¹ M[useum]A[nnual]R[eport] 1935–36.

²² Potassium nitrate is non-hygroscopic, white crystalline salt that is well associated with degradation processes of porous materials. In the case of a wall painting, the crystallization of potassium nitrate within the micro-cavities of the underlying stone matrix or supporting ground material, results in the production of mechanical stress and/or chemical alterations which may result in an eventual flaking-off or powdering of the pictorial layer. Pique Francesca et al, 'Physicochemical aspects of the deliquescence of calcium nitrate and its implications for wall painting conservation', in *Studies in Conservation* 1992, Vol. 37 (UK: International Institute for Conservation, 1992), p.217.

²³ Vella Stephanie, *Vincenzo Bonello as a Pioneer in Maltese Art History and Criticism*, (Unpublished Bachelor's dissertation, University of Malta, 1997), p.64.



FIGURE 4 DETAIL OF PART OF THE VAULT PAINTING OF ST. JOHN'S CO-CATHEDRAL, VALLETTA DURING THE REMOVAL OF THE OVER PAINTING.

With Bonello's appointment as Inspector of Works of Art, this new approach towards conservation and restoration of works of art acquired an official status. Presumably all the interventions carried out either by himself or else under his supervision followed this policy. Bonello's competence can be appreciated when he dealt with Augusto Vermehren, a well-known restorer living in Florence, who had been recommended by Bernard Berenson during the latter's visit to Malta in 1935, to restore the panel attributed to Botticelli at the national collection. In his intervention proposal on the said panel, Vermehren suggested that if the wooden support was in a very deteriorated state, transfer of the pictorial layer would be needed. Bonello was of the opinion that such an intervention was drastic.²⁴

In 1937, as a result of increasing official intolerance of his strong pro-Italian views, Bonello was dismissed from the Museum and from the School of Art where he lectured in History of Art and was eventually exiled from Malta to Uganda for the whole duration of the War.²⁵ His post was subsequently taken up by Antonio Sciortino who had just

²⁴ The intervention was, for unknown reasons, shelved. NAM-CSG 1/1839/1937.

²⁵ Vella Stephanie, *Vincenzo Bonello as a Pioneer in Maltese Art History and Criticism*, (Unpublished Bachelor's dissertation, University of Malta, 1997), p.48.

returned to Malta from Italy. The primary activity of the Fine Arts Section within the Museums Department was the conservation and restoration of works of art. This was rather routine activity, so much so that Sciortino stated that, by 1939, exactly at the beginning of the period under discussion, the practice of conservation and restoration had already formed a considerable part of the duties of the Fine Arts section.

Throughout the war, conservation and restoration of works of art became a pressing need and, notwithstanding the hard conditions of those days, extensive conservation and restoration interventions were carried out on hundreds of paintings. It would be unrealistic to state categorically that the standards established by Bonello were not sustained by Sciortino. Bonello's writing in 1920 was charting a new direction for the practice of conservation ethics in Malta, while Sciortino was frantically trying to cope with a catastrophic situation during the chaotic years of the war. It is clear that the two scenarios have to be judged on their own merits and cannot be compared by any single yardstick. However, this upsurge in quality conservation and restoration was rudely disrupted by the War.

The very same Museum where these restorers worked, the Auberge d'Italie, received a first direct hit, on 7 April 1942, and unfortunately, the bomb which detonated at the basement level of the museum caused serious harm to the already damaged paintings (waiting to be restored) and other intact canvases which were stored there. A number of paintings which had been restored and were "awaiting their removal from the Museum" to be stored in a more secure place, were damaged once more. Paintings which were not damaged were kept in the basement for almost three years after the end of the war. Once again the environmental conditions of the place were, in the words of the Museum authorities, "not adequate". Consequently, some minor damage was found to have taken place. When the war was almost over, several paintings were in fact taken to a country palace "to be aired and dried" from the dampness of the shelters in which these were kept for the duration of the war.



FIGURE 5 BASEMENT OF THE AUBERGE D'ITALIE, SHOWING THE BARREL VAULTING PARTLY RECONSTRUCTED AFTER THE WAR.



FIGURE 6 ANTONIO SCIORTINO SURROUNDING BY A GROUP OF RESTORERS MOST PROBABLY TAKEN AT THE ROMAN VILA AT RABAT.

Following the direct hit one imagined that the restoration activity would cease. This was not the case as the restoration work continued unabated. The restorers moved to a central area of Malta at the Roman Villa in Rabat which was relatively safer from bombing but meant more hardship for them since public transport had been reduced to a minimum and petrol was severely rationed.

Obtaining materials to work with must have been a nightmare. Although funds had been voted for the restoration of damaged paintings, the vote for such purpose was drastically reduced. But even if money was not a problem, in those difficult times many essential commodities and supplies were scarce and therefore one expected that materials employed in restoration would be difficult to find. This also impeded Sciortino and his staff from proceeding smoothly with their work. At one point Sciortino explained to the Assistant Lieutenant Governor the difficulties which he and his staff were experiencing in the restoration of paintings owing “to lack of certain commodities”. They were unable to obtain alcohol for cleaning paintings, as the methylated spirit which was being used damaged the paint. They had been unable to find suitable wood for “backing the canvas of the pictures” and to find French nails for nailing the canvas to the stretcher frame.

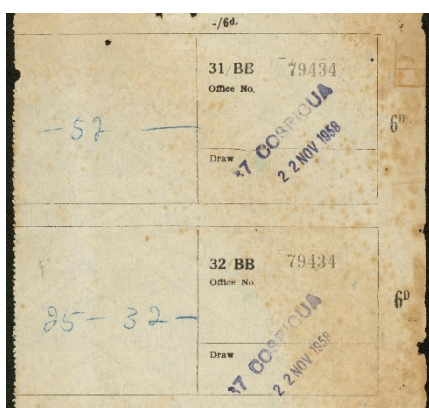


FIGURE 7 LOTTERY TICKETS WERE USED EITHER TO PROTECT PAINTINGS FROM FURTHER DAMAGE OR IN THE COURSE OF A RESTORATION INTERVENTION.

Many materials were substituted with others which were cheaper or less difficult to find. Starch and flour were used instead of animal glues, while Indian fig juice was used as a binding medium instead of arabic

gum. Unsold lottery tickets have been used to face the painting prior to relining. Red pepper was mixed with the relining glue as a deterrent against insects. Owing to lack of wood, many stretcher frames were mended and reinforced with other pieces of salvaged wood. Shaping new oval stretcher frames was avoided as these were complicated to make and also needed a considerable amount of wood. Stretcher frames which were beyond repair were taken apart to make new ones. Many paintings were relined. While new canvas could be spared for the relining of small paintings, this could not be done with large ones. Large paintings which had previously been relined but had been damaged during the War, were stripped of the old relining canvas. The latter was cleaned of the old relining glue, mended or stitched and re-used for the relining of the same painting.



FIGURE 8 RE-STITCHED AND RE-USED RELINING CANVAS.

Cleaning entailed not only the removal of dark varnishes but also the removal of previous retouchings and overpaintings. Mixtures of solvents were generally used to remove overpaintings. The most

popular solvent for the removal of the varnish layer was methylated spirit. This was normally diluted with turpentine in the proportion of 1:1. However these two solvents do not mix and therefore constant shaking of the mixture was necessary. Ammonia was also very popular. But restorers knew about the adverse effects of ammonia on paintings and when this was applied, it was immediately neutralized by turpentine. In some cases when the overpainting was found to have been done owing to previous overcleaning, it was not removed. Nineteenth-century paintings were not cleaned with strong solvents as they knew that such paintings would be very sensitive to such treatment.

The restorers were also aware of original corrections, or *pentimenti*, in paintings. During the cleaning of a painting representing the Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Rocaful, which was at those times hanging in the sacristy of St John's Co-Cathedral, great care was taken during cleaning not to uncover a portrait which was partly visible under some ornaments in the background. The restorers were certain that the portrait was covered on purpose by the artist as it was disturbing the composition of the painting. The integration of missing areas was done to match the rest of the painting. In some instances it was described as hardly visible. Although the missing parts were generally reconstructed, overpainting was not the order of the day. Oil colours (although used) were not preferred for retouching as they knew that these darken after some time.

Sometimes honey-based varnish was used as a protective coating for paintings. This was generally applied on heavily damaged paintings. Paintings treated with honey-based varnish would eventually acquire a yellowish brown patina and have a large number of fly spots.

It was in this scenario that the Museum authorities and a few individuals had to strive to safeguard the national artistic wealth. Thanks to all those who in some way or another participated in this process, our generation can today still appreciate works of art that are not only highly significant to Malta but also internationally. Ironically, the War highlighted many works of art that were already in a

deplorable state before the outbreak of hostilities. Between 1939 and 1947, some 430 paintings and other works, several of museum quality, were restored by the Museums Department.²⁶ Between 1948 and 1950, while reconstruction was gaining ground in the civilian sphere, another 52 paintings which had been damaged were also restored.²⁷ These statistics may give the impression that the type of interventions carried out in those years was inadequate. It is true that such circumstances could not permit proper conservation and restoration, which in itself, is a methodical and sedate practice that can only be carried out in peace time under proper laboratory conditions. It is also true that the restorers who intervened on the nation's best paintings had no formal training in conservation. Today, one may find fault with their methodology as this largely rested on empirical knowledge. Nonetheless, these artist restorers saved hundreds of works of art.

Safeguarding the precious elements of civilization in a catastrophic situation where people had to strive to save their own lives might sound strange.²⁸ Nowadays many are conscious that the national artistic patrimony is one of the main channels through which cultural identity is transmitted. While our present culture will continue to enhance our national patrimony, what we have already inherited is that which our past culture has left us and is now historic. According to Alois Riegl (1858–1905), the Austrian art historian and aesthetician, 'everything that succeeds was conditioned by what came before and would not have occurred in a manner in which it did if not for those precedents.' The national artistic patrimony should therefore be considered as irreplaceable heritage even if partly maimed by the War.

This may be the reason why, in the restoration of the sixteenth-century painted panels which decorated the balcony in the Hall of St Michael and St George in the Governor's Palace, a splinter which had lodged

²⁶ MAR 1946–47.

²⁷ Information taken from various Museum Annual Reports.

²⁸ Walsh, K., *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Postmodern World*, (London: Routledge, 1995), p.73.

itself in one of the panels was left as a memento.²⁹ It is fitting that the trauma of war is never forgotten.

²⁹ N[ational]M[useum]F[ine]A[rts] Archives, handwritten notes attached to the draft of the MAR 1945–46.

CARLO CUSSETTI, PITTORE E RESTAURATORE,
TORINO, 1866-1949, BY PAOLO SAN
MARTINO

This paper considers the not famous figure of Carlo Cussetti (Turin, 1866-1949); a painter who “evolved” into restorer. Being educated in Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti of Turin, he became a respected painter working, among others, in the palaces of the Quirinale and Queen Margherita (current embassy of the USA). Further, he collaborated with art historians, critics, and directors of museum, like Lionello Venturi, Alessandro Baudi di Vesme and Vittorio Viale, especially when he was working in the main museum institutions of the Piemonte, where he turned to be the most important restorer of the region of the first half of the century. More, in the period of the foundation of the Istituto Centrale del Restauro of Rome and the theories of Cesare Brandi, he acquired those technical and scientific knowledge that will make him a modern technician of the restoration

Carlo Cussetti è stato il più grande restauratore piemontese della prima metà del XX secolo. Si può dire che dagli anni venti la maggior parte dei restauri pittorici in Piemonte fu a lui affidata. La figura di Cussetti è particolarmente importante perché segna in prima persona il passaggio da una concezione estetizzante del restauro ad una metodologia scientifica e tecnologica, negli anni della fondazione dell'Istituto Centrale del Restauro e della teoria idealistica di Cesare Brandi. Nato a Torino il 29 aprile 1866 da famiglia d'origine ligure fu inizialmente esclusivamente pittore, allievo di Enrico Gamba all'Accademia Albertina di Torino,¹ dedicandosi anche all'arte applicata

¹ Cussetti nasce a Torino il 29 aprile 1866 da Giovanni e Anna Canevello. Sposato a Giovanna (Jeanne) Marest (1894-1965) risulta, dai documenti anagrafici dell'Archivio Storico della Città di Torino, di professione pittore. Ha una sorella, Matilde (Torino 20 aprile 1862, ivi 8 luglio 1932), che abitava in via Sant'Anselmo 24, ovvero all'indirizzo del laboratorio di restauro. Carlo abita nel 1932 in via Sant'Anselmo 22, per poi passare al 25 il 15 dicembre 1948, poco prima della sua scomparsa del 9 gennaio 1949. Su Cussetti si veda Thieme-Becker VIII, 1913, p. 218; A.M. Comanducci, *I pittori italiani dell'Ottocento*, Milano 1934, pp. 171-72; Vollmer I, 1953, p. 504; F. Corrado-P. San Martino, *Ottocento barocco. Mobili «in stile» negli*

e all'incisione nel clima di entusiasmo per le arti decorative del fine secolo torinese. Fa parte sin da giovanissimo di una ristretta équipe di artisti e decoratori attivi per Casa Savoia con la direzione dell'architetto Emilio Stramucci. Nel 1887 assiste Rodolfo Morgari (pittore con cui collaborò per dieci anni) nella decorazione di una sala del Palazzo del Quirinale a Roma. Sue opere appartengono ai completamenti e restauri otto-novecenteschi dei palazzi reali di Torino e Racconigi. Pittore favorito della regina Margherita, è incaricato della decorazione in tono *Arts and Crafts* per la Palazzina Reale di Gressoney nei primi anni del Novecento. Specializzatosi nella decorazione di interni di vasta dimensione, secondo la migliore tradizione della pittura murale italiana, realizza a Torino decorazioni per la Palazzina Marone Cinzano, il plafond della Grande Sala del futuro Palazzo Enel, l'ornamentazione della Sala del Consiglio del Palazzo della Gazzetta del Popolo e la scenografica pittura quadraturista della nuova Sala delle Feste del rinato Palazzo Madama.² È il momento dei massimi riconoscimenti per un artista di

arredi umbertini del Palazzo Reale di Torino, 1880-1908, in "Studi Piemontesi", XXII, 2, 1993, pp. 393-98; Idem, *Stramucci, Cussetti, Dellera e la Real Palazzina di Margherita di Savoia a Gressoney (1899-1907)*, in "Studi Piemontesi", XXIV, 1, 1995, pp. 131-36; C. Thellung, *Arredare un palazzo, allestire un museo: nota dei lavori per Palazzo Madama (1925-34)*, in AA.VV., *Il Tesoro della Città. Opere d'arte e oggetti preziosi da Palazzo Madama*, catalogo della mostra, Torino 1996, pp. 124-25; F. Corrado-P. San Martino, *Un "palazzo principesco" nella Torino fin de siècle: Palazzo Reale Nuovo di Emilio Stramucci*, in "Studi Piemontesi" XXVII, 1, pp. 137-144; Idem, *Palazzo Madama: una scala, due piazze e tre facciate*, in "Bollettino della Società Piemontese di Archeologia e Belle Arti", N.S. 49.1997(2000), pp. 77-94; P. San Martino, *Cussetti, Carlo*, in *Saur Allgemeines Künstler-Lexicon. Die Bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, 23, München-Leipzig 1999, p. 205; F. Corrado-P. San Martino, *Artisti e Funzionari nel Palazzo Reale di Torino e altre residenze sul crinale dei due secoli*, in *Torino 1863-1963, architettura, arte, urbanistica*, Torino 2002, pp. 117-144; R. Genta, *La cultura del restauro a Torino nell'opera di Carlo Cussetti*, in *Il corpo dello stile: cultura e lettura del restauro nelle esperienze contemporanee*, a cura di C. Piva e I. Sgarbozza. Coordinamento scientifico di M. Dalai Emiliani, O. Rossi Pinelli, M. di Macco, Roma, 2005, pp. 265-269; A. Cifani, F. Monetti, *La palazzina Marone Cinzano. Sede del Centro Congressi dell'Unione Industriale di Torino*, con un intervento di G. Mola di Nomaglio, Torino 2012, pp. 19-41; F. Corrado-P. San Martino, *Emilio Stramucci architetto romano, arbiter elegantiarum nei palazzi dei reali d'Italia*, in corso di stampa.

² Si veda la serie di manifesti pubblicitari per la Compagnia ferroviaria Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée, litografie a colori, alcuni passati recentemente in asta (Christie's, Parigi, 27 settembre 2011, vendita 1959, lotto 65, 97, 98; Van Sabben Auctions, Hoorn, NL, 21 aprile 2012, lotto 744) e la cartolina postale in tricomia, da un suo acquarello, che rappresenta il Palazzo di

grande fama e grandi mezzi, poi repentinamente caduto nell'oblio. Il suo stile, dopo la fase neo settecentesca, alla Beaumont (quale si vede nel Gran Salone del Palazzo Reale Nuovo di Torino ad inizio secolo), si avvicina ai modi del realismo purista in chiave storicista (che fu anche di Gregorio Sciltian), comune a tanta parte della pittura europea degli anni venti e trenta. Fu grande restauratore di dipinti antichi, attività che intraprese molto presto e che segnò tutta la sua vita di artista, in una sovrapposizione del suo stile moderno sull'enorme bagaglio visivo dell'esperto d'arte antica. Il passaggio dalla pittura al restauro si deve ad un'intuizione di Emilio Stramucci, negli anni dei lavori in Palazzo Margherita e a Gressoney:

Fu durante quel periodo che lo Stramucci, notando che alcuni quadri di proprietà della Real Casa si erano deteriorati, invitò il pittore a studiare il modo di restaurarli. Prima, di porvi mano, Cussetti volle farsi una preparazione culturale e tecnica, e solamente quando si sentì sicuro di sè vi si accinse. Aveva trovata la sua via!³

Gli anni trenta sono il momento tipico della sua lunga attività, che comprende l'affidamento di delicati lavori di strappo di affreschi di vastissima dimensione. Durante la ricostruzione del primo tratto di via Roma, ancora di gusto tardo storicista, il Senatore Giovanni Agnelli gli affida il distacco di una pittura murale di oltre 50 metri quadrati, appartenente al distrutto Palazzo Tana di Entracque. Agnelli, e il suo

Francia all'Esposizione torinese del 1911 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 3 luglio 1911, n. 154, p. 4092). Incisioni derivate da altri acquarelli sono presenti nel *Giornale Ufficiale dell'Esposizione di Torino*. Collezionò dipinti come una *Susanna e i Vecchioni*, attribuito a Bernardo Strozzi e a Francesco Furini (Bologna, Fototeca della Fondazione Federico Zeri), ed esposto nel 1922 alla mostra della pittura italiana del Seicento e Settecento a Palazzo Pitti a Firenze (catalogo a cura di N. Tarchiani, pp. 191-192, n. 1050). Il comitato torinese per la mostra era composto da Baudi, Bertea, Venturi, Chevalley, Falletti, Bistolfi, Rubino, Grosso. Fra i privati prestatori Thaon di Revel, Gualino, Besozzi, Compans de Brichanteau, Accorsi, Chevalley, Cussetti («La Stampa», 27 marzo 1922). Da ricordare anche l'allestimento per il IV *Salon* dell'automobile di Torino, tenutosi al Valentino e arricchito da lavori artistici oltre che di Cussetti, di Aloatti, Ceragioli, Mazzuccotelli e altri («La Stampa», 16 febbraio 1907). Ammiratissimo lo stand della Lux «rappresentante il sole, opera del cav. Cussetti» («La Stampa», 18 febbraio 1907).

³ «Stampa Sera», 19 maggio 1936.

ingegnere Giovanni Canova, qui applica il metodo Stramucci, che consiste nel recupero e trasferimento di antichi arredi. Mobili Tana giungono alla casa del figlio Edoardo, e dei nipoti Gianni e Susanna, in corso Oporto, all'interno d'un severo edificio Renaissance del Petiti, l'architetto dell'aristocrazia e dell'alta borghesia torinese *fin de siècle*. Le porte sono girate anche alla figlia Aniceta Agnelli Nasi, che le riutilizza nel rinnovato Palazzo d'Azeglio di via Principe Amedeo.⁴ Restava il problema delle opere fisse, e soprattutto del grande plafond di soggetto mitologico che le guide antiche della città attribuivano al fiorentino Sebastiano Galeotti. Interviene Cussetti, che con audacia tipica del personaggio, trasporta su tela l'intero affresco, per riposizionarlo nel salone del nuovo palazzo de La Stampa:

Per dare un'idea dell'importanza e della mole di un tale lavoro basti il dire che il comm. Cussetti vi ha impiegato due anni compiuti. L'affresco maggiore non poteva venire staccato tutto d'un pezzo: fu infatti necessario dividerlo in cinque parti. Chi oggi lo osserva non scorge, neppure la più piccola traccia di sutura. In giusto riconoscimento sta il più grande elogio che si possa rivolgere al Cussetti, che ha ormai fama di espertissimo restauratore di opere di arte.⁵

Un'operazione delicatissima, al tempo salutata come un assoluto «record». Purtroppo il dipinto, che era sopravvissuto alla demolizione dell'antica via Roma, non sfuggì alla furia delle bombe inglesi, che lo devastarono unitamente a vasti tratti della strada e di piazza San Carlo. Nel nuovo Palazzo della Cassa di Risparmio di Torino, ricostruito ecletticamente da Giovanni Chevalley inglobando parti di edifici preesistenti, Cussetti sperimenta lo stesso sistema, strappando anche fragili tempere parietali. Mentre nel caso precedente il pittore-restauratore aveva operato sezionando il vasto affresco in cinque porzioni, seguendo dove possibile le giunte delle giornate, qui arrischia con successo un unico strappo:

⁴ P. San Martino, *Sovrapposizioni architettoniche, decorative e di arredo nel Palazzo d'Azeglio di Torino*, in atti del convegno *Emanuele Tapparelli d'Azeglio: collezionista, mecenate e filantropo*, a cura di S. Pettenati, A. Crosetti, G. Carità, Torino, 1995, p. 141-148.

⁵ «La Stampa», 28 gennaio 1934.

Il palazzo della vecchia sede, come ognuno sa, era monumento nazionale e fu potuto demolire solamente dietro certe condizioni di ricostruzione e conservazione. Fra l'altro, è stato fatto obbligo di conservare alcuni affreschi, sommantati a più di cento metri quadrati; ed essi sono stati tolti dal prof. Cussetti col sistema che abbiamo visto, in circa otto mesi di lavoro, ed attendono ora di essere collocati sulle nuove volte e sulle nuove pareti. La traslazione del grande affresco di 36 metri, in un sol pezzo, rappresenta il «clou» di simili imprese. Diremo qui, di passaggio, che il Cussetti in occasione di tali lavori ha raggiunto un altro «record», trasportando, oltre agli affreschi, anche alcune tempere a muro; impresa che finora non era stata eseguita. Se si pensa che egli [...] nel magnifico restauro dell' «Aprile» di Fontanesi è pure ricorso al sistema di trasportare lo spessore della pittura ad olio, si deduce che questo tecnico-artista è, nella sua partita, una specie di mago onnipotente. Con tutto ciò, egli confessa che ogni volta che ripete l'impresa è preso dal batticuore. E' il senso della responsabilità che pesa grandemente sulla sensibilità di un artista. Le due più grosse emozioni egli le ha provate quando ha fatto il primo esperimento, parecchi anni fa, e quando ha restaurato l' «Aprile» di Fontanesi, circa un anno addietro. La lunga carriera, e i brillanti successi non hanno dunque eliminato il timor panico...⁶

Il brillante recupero del dipinto fontanesiano si deve anche al temperamento di Cussetti, che Vittorio Viale ricorda affettuosamente nel necrologio⁷ successivo alla scomparsa del 9 gennaio 1949. Lo fotografa nella «giovane sua prestantza», con lo «sguardo pieno di vita» e lo «spirito alacre», «infaticabile». Arzillo e «rubizzo torinese che qualcosa serbava della sua origine ligure, vivacissimo nonostante gli ottantadue anni che lasciavano increduli quanti avevano occasione di aver a che fare con lui».⁸ Un vecchio leone, così lo rammentava Roberto Gabetti.⁹ «Era pittore di talento; ma il nome che aveva, se lo era fatto

⁶ «La Stampa», 8 dicembre 1932.

⁷ V. Viale, *Carlo Cussetti*, in «Bollettino della Spaba», 2.1948, p. 219-221.

⁸ «La Stampa», 11 gennaio 1949.

⁹ Comunicazione scritta dell'architetto Gabetti.

soprattutto come grande maestro del restauro». ¹⁰ Aveva «profonda conoscenza delle tecniche e dei sistemi, fatta di studio, di esperienza e di prove». ¹¹ Uomo di fiducia di Viale, lo è anche di Lionello Venturi e di Alessandro Baudi di Vesme presso la Galleria Sabauda, dove è presente nel «laboratorio di restaurazione». ¹² Viale lo menziona con riconoscenza nel catalogo della mostra Gotico e Rinascimento in Piemonte (1939), due anni dopo la prima grande mostra del barocco:

cinque mesi è [...] occorso al restauro dei dipinti.

Sono ben 130 i quadri piccoli, grandi, e grandissimi, che il prof. Carlo Cussetti, questo benefico e bravo medico delle vecchie tavole, ha curato e riparato con la sua paziente, delicata, capace opera di restauro (p. VII).

Nel 1936 il giornalista de La Stampa Ugo Pavia presenta Cussetti al vasto pubblico. E' una sorta di intervista, in cui Cussetti si rivela anche esperto d'arte e scopritore di falsi:

E' da molti anni — ci ha detto il comm. Carlo Cussetti — che falsi Fontanesi sono in circolazione e passano dall'uno all'altro collezionista. Ve ne sono parecchi a Torino, e non in minor numero ne sono stati venduti sulla piazza di Milano. All'epoca in cui Torino, per onorare l'insigne paesista scomparso, preparò la grande mostra alla Galleria d'Arte Moderna, molti collezionisti privati offrirono spontaneamente i Fontanesi che possedevano. Fu una occasione magnifica per constatare quante falsificazioni passavano per opere autentiche, mercè l'autenticazione (falsa anche questa) di un allievo del Maestro: il pittore Calderini. Questa truffa — aggiunge il nostro interlocutore — è facilitata dal desiderio di fare un grosso affare; esso spinge molti raccoglitori di opere ad acquistare quadri e sculture senza richiedere soverchie garanzie, consigli e giudizi di esperti... La lusinga di pagare un prezzo molto inferiore a quello che sarebbe stato richiesto se si trattasse di opere autentiche è sufficiente a spingere questa gente ad affrettarsi a concludere subito l'affare, prima che sfugga l'occasione. Ciascuno crede

¹⁰ V. Viale, *Carlo Cussetti*, cit.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² «La Stampa», 16 settembre 1923.

in tal modo di impiegare assai bene il proprio capitale, ed invece lo perde [...]. Nel 1932 un ricco signore il quale aveva pagato 112 mila lire dodici quadri di Fontanesi, Segantini, Palizzi e Corot, fu preso dal dubbio di essere stato gabbato: ma era come quei malati i quali temono di andar dal medico per sentirsi dire che sono infermi. Egli non voleva sentire un giudizio definitivo. Quei quadri erano altrettante... autentiche imitazioni e potevano venir valutati un centinaio di lire ciascuno, compresa la cornice! Era stato un ottimo impiego di capitale! Una volta si recò da lui — è sempre il comm. Cussetti che narra — un tale che desiderava appunto un giudizio su di un Fontanesi che veniva offerto a buonissime condizioni. A dimostrarne l'autenticità era garantito da una lettera del Fontanesi diretta ad un signore (anche questa lettera era falsificata, come era stato falsificato il quadro) nella quale era detto che un dipinto come desiderava egli l'aveva eseguito e depositato presso una famiglia dove era facilmente rintracciabile. Per meglio specificare di che quadro si trattasse, in calce alla lettera vi era uno schizzo a penna del quadro stesso. Come si vede la trappola era stata montata con grande scaltrezza. Era una pensata veramente originale di far apparire autentico un quadro d'autore da una lettera dell'autore stesso [...]. Il comm. Cussetti ha 66 anni, ma ne dimostra una decina di meno. Quale rinomanza abbia raggiunto nell'arte del restauro lo dicono le tele che vediamo nel suo studio. Sono capolavori a cui gli anni, ed a volte i secoli, hanno procurato delle malattie che il medico delle pitture si ingegna di guarire. Per curare le malattie di queste tele preziose non sarebbe sufficiente un medico condotto: occorre lo specialista di grido, ed uno degli specialisti più sicuri, più coscienziosi è appunto questo pittore torinese. E' d'un temperamento tranquillo, sereno, e sono forse state queste sue solide qualità, unite ad una perizia pittorica di prim'ordine, ad una scrupolosità che va fino all'estremo limite, che l'hanno portato a dedicarsi ad un lavoro così estremamente delicato, così pieno di responsabilità.¹³

¹³ U. Pavia, *Stampa Sera dà la parola a Carlo Cussetti. Quadri veri e quadri falsi al vaglio inesorabile della scienza*, in «Stampa Sera», 19 maggio 1936. Si veda anche M. Bernardi, *Nella misteriosa fucina dei restauratori di quadri*, in «La Stampa», 8 gennaio 1938.

Il suo specialismo è il restauro, e attorno ruota la sua sensibilità di raffinato pittore e l'intelligenza del conoscitore d'arte. Ma «Lo studio massimo di un restauratore è quello di spersonalizzarsi; di cercare di interpretare volta per volta lo spirito e la tecnica dei diversi autori dei capolavori».¹⁴

L'ultimo ritrovato per smascherare le falsità col «vaglio inesorabile della scienza» è la «macchina che scopre le bugie», una macchina della verità più efficace di quella che si applica agli umani. Si trattava dello «schermo di Wood». Suo collaboratore in questa vicenda è il fotografo e studioso di arti decorative Augusto Pedrini, che lo affianca nella difficile impresa. Si esamina un autoritratto di Tiziano che un «distinto signore» ha portato ai due specialisti:

Al cav. Pedrini, che oltre ad un esperto operatore è anche un ricercatore ed un conoscitore d'arte, non sfuggiva la rassomiglianza del ritratto presentatogli con quello della Galleria del Prado. La tela sul quale era dipinto appariva effettivamente una tela dell'epoca. Il possessore di quel quarto autoritratto del Tiziano — ammenoché non si fosse trattato dell'autentica opera che fosse scomparsa dalla Galleria del Prado — l'aveva acquistato a Venezia attraverso una serie di intermediari. Vi erano dichiarazioni di esperti d'arte che stabilivano trattarsi di un vero Tiziano e quel signore, un appassionato d'arte, dopo lunghe contrattazioni aveva finito per cedere al vivissimo desiderio di possedere un così prezioso dipinto che avrebbe arricchito la sua raccolta. Per qualche anno quel signore aveva vissuto nella certezza di avere un autoritratto del Tiziano, ma avendogli qualcuno, fra i tanti a cui egli orgogliosamente l'aveva mostrato, manifestato dubbi sull'autenticità del quadro, dubbi che le dichiarazioni esibite non avevano fugato, anch'egli aveva finito per non sentirsi più tranquillo. Dopo molte esitazioni avendo appreso dell'esistenza della misteriosa macchina che rivelava i trucchi pittorici, si era deciso. Trepidante attendeva nella camera oscura che la macchina entrasse in funzione. Quando dopo quel caratteristico «friggere» che fanno le lampade di quarzo quando si accendono, una luce quasi irreale inondava la preziosa tela, un grido sfuggiva all'appassionato raccoglitore di dipinti.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Sotto quella luce il ritratto del Tiziano era scomparso: la barba se ne era andata, così pure il pennello ed anche la mano che lo teneva. Rimaneva sì un ritratto ma di un ignoto individuo dal volto glabro. Evidentemente un ritratto di scuola veneziana dipinto intorno al 1500 come lo attestava la tela, ma di autore ignoto che nessuna ragione di parentela aveva col Tiziano. Certamente qualche pittore di poco scrupolo rilevato nei tratti di quell'ignoto avevano qualche rassomiglianza con quelli del grande maestro aveva, con indubbia perizia, operata la trasformazione prendendo a modello l'autoritratto della galleria del Prado, e riuscendo con il suo lavoro a trarre in inganno anche intenditori d'arte. Molti avevano potuto essere tratti in inganno, non la lampada portentosa che fluorescenze non risvegliava se non nei più antichi colori che la tela conservava. Quella lampada emana si può dire «la luce della verità».¹⁵

¹⁵ U. Pavia, *Una macchina che scopre le bugie. Come è stata svelata la falsità di un quarto autoritratto del Tiziano*, in «Stampa Sera», 25 ottobre 1941.

FROM WALL TO MUSEUM: MATERIAL AND SYMBOLIC TRANSFORMATION OF PAINTINGS IN PARIS AROUND 1775, BY NOÉMIE ETIENNE

It has been noted by scholars that the Revolution era is deeply concerned about conservation and destruction issues: through the deleting of symbols, the repainting and the destruction of specific artworks and monuments, the Revolution aims to rewrite the History of France. Doing so, French people build a specific relation with their own past, quickly named the "*Ancien Régime*". This material reconstruction of Past and Present has already begun in the 18th Century. The conservation state of the objects is not the only topic of these discussions: different factors, depending on time and context, determine the selection of paintings to be manipulated, restored, conserved, detached or destructed, and the choice of specific elements. In this perspective, this paper points out how distinguishing choices were made according to various values around 1775 in Paris and create "heritage", i.e. a corpus of objects united to have an impact in the future.

On-going debates on the social identity of art restorers, discussions about new restoration techniques, controversies surrounding several interventions, as well as frequent exhibition of restored paintings bring out the importance of conservation issues in Paris in the second half of the 18th Century.¹ It has been noted by scholars that the Revolution era is deeply concerned about conservation and destruction issues:² through the deleting of symbols, the repainting and the destruction of specific artworks and monuments, the Revolution aims to rewrite the History of France. Doing so, French people build a specific relation with their own past, quickly named the "*Ancien Régime*". This material reconstruction of Past and Present has already begun in the 18th Century. In 1773, a letter to the royal administration clearly emphasized the importance given to the selection of restored artworks: "Le choix

¹ ETIENNE, N., *La restauration des peintures à Paris, 1750-1815. Pratiques et discours sur la matérialité des œuvres d'art*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012.

² RÉAU, L., *Histoire du vandalisme : les monuments détruits de l'art français*, Paris, Hachette, 1959 ; POULOT, D., *Surveiller et s'instruire, la Révolution française et l'intelligence de l'héritage historique*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1996.

des restaurations est très important."³ The conservation state of the objects was not the only topic of these discussions: different factors, depending on time and context, determined the selection of paintings to be manipulated, restored, conserved, detached or destructed, and the choice of specific elements. In this perspective, this paper points out how distinguishing choices were made according to various values around 1775 in Paris and create "heritage", i.e. a corpus of objects united to have an impact in the future.

From a methodological perspective, this paper addresses the idea that artworks are subject to change and material transformation throughout their existence - and are actually "works in progress" rather than stable objects, as Igor Kopytoff, Arjun Appadurai and Alfred Gell have suggested.⁴ First, I would like to point out how the identity of a painting can change in a short period of time, according to its institutional and political context. Second, I wish to underline the role of technical and material manipulations in this process. And finally, I will argue that

these redefinitions are not permanent and may be reversible. All the case studies I will present describe the afterlife of wall paintings in the 18th century in Paris. I would like to begin by focusing on murals, and later on, I will also integrate other paintings that have less directly been incorporated in an architectural space. Indeed, many paintings from the 18th century - and before - were created for specific spaces and directly related to their environment, even if they were only partly - or even not at all - physically attached to the building.

Reframing Le Sueur

In France, at the end of the 1740s, the detachment of frescoes and murals paintings was a new technique allowing the removal of these objects. Invented in Italy, the technique was known in France around 1750 and used for

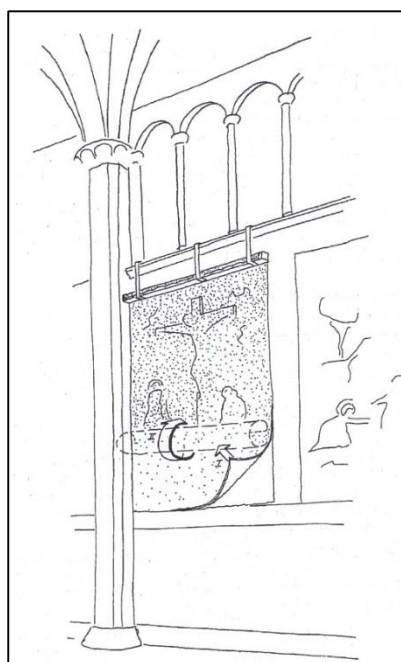


FIGURE 9 STRAPPO TECHNIQUE, IN MORA, P. AND L., PHILIPPOT, P. *LA CONSERVATION DES PEINTURES MURALES*, BOLOGNE, COMpositori, 1977, p. 296.

³ Paris, Archives Nationales (AN), O1 1912.2-99.

⁴ APPADURAI, A. (dir.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, New York, 1988 ; GELL, A., *Art and Agency. An anthropological Theory*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998.

the first time by the French restorer Robert Picault (fig. 1). This material transformation involves two important stages: the detachment of the artwork, more or less invasive, depending on the context; and its rehabilitation and re-stabilization in a new space, sometimes involving a size transformation. Thus, this intervention is connected with other practices, such as cutting the border of the painting and updating it in many ways. In the first part, I would like to show how all these material transformations are also related to cultural ambitions and symbolic transformations.

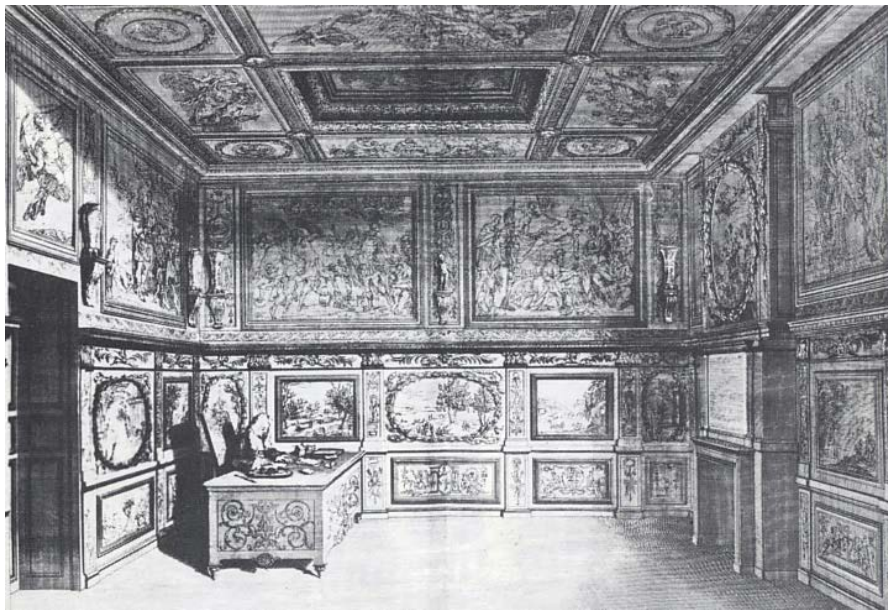


FIGURE 2 BERNARD PICART, « VUE DU CABINET DE L'AMOUR » IN *LES PEINTURES DE CHARLES LE BRUN ET D'EUSTACHE LE SUEUR QUI SONT DANS L'HOTEL DE CHATELET CI-DEVANT LA MAISON DU PRESIDENT LAMBERT, PARIS, 1740.*



FIGURE 3 EUSTACHE LE SUEUR, *PHAETON DEMANDE A CONDUIRE LE CHAR DE SON PERE*, 1646-1647, 278 x 360 cm, INV, 8056, PARIS, MUSEE DU LOUVRE. © RMN.

During the 1770s, the number of detached and transported paintings significantly increased in Paris. Many paintings were transported from private houses to the Louvre. An interesting case study may be mentioned in this context. In 1776, the Hotel Lambert was for sale. Around 1650, the French painter Eustache Le Sueur had completed two series of paintings in this building, to decorate two “cabinets” (office rooms): the *Cabinet de l’Amour* and the *Cabinet des Muses* (fig. 2).⁵ Located on the second floor of the “hotel”, the *cabinet des Muses* had a ceiling painted on plaster, representing *Phaeton asking to drive the chariot of his father* (fig. 3). Originally, the cabinet was extended by a richly decorated alcove, in which Le Sueur had painted five wooden panels representing the nine Muses. The *Cabinet de l’Amour* was part of Nicolas Lambert’s apartment located at the first floor of the Hotel. Five panels depicting the mythological *History of Love* were incorporated into the ceiling carpentry, with other paintings hanged on the walls. In 1776, d’Angiviller decided to buy these paintings from the Hotel Lambert. All these elements were removed from their original locations and transported to the Louvre to be restored and framed. The institutional context may explain this situation. At the time, d’Angiviller was wishing to open a new museum, to replace the gallery opened in the Luxembourg Palace in 1750. Indeed, after the opening of this first public exhibition space in Paris, a second project attracts undivided attention: the project of a Museum intended for the Louvre.⁶ This venture never succeeded and only came true after the French Revolution. It is well known today as the Musée du Louvre. Contemporary artists were part of the expected public. The educational argument was essential: the exhibited and restored artworks had to be useful to young artists. In 1773, the painter Etienne Jaurat stated that the paintings should pose as examples for future students:

"D’où l’on conclut que les Tableaux du Roi doivent être placés dans un lieu où ils réunissent l’utilité à la magnificence. On doit d’autant plus

⁵ *Le Cabinet de l’Amour de l’Hôtel Lambert*, exhibition catalog (Musée du Louvre), Paris, RMN, 1972.

⁶ McCELLAN, A., *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-century Paris*, Cambridge, University Press, 1994.

s'occuper de l'utilité c'est-à-dire de l'étude des jeunes élèves que les Etrangers dépouillent successivement la France, et qu'il ne reste de Grands Modèles rassemblés que chez le Roi, et au Palais Royal."⁷

The exhibition and conservation of artworks had a goal: making the "famous examples" from the past available to contemporary artists. Around 1775, the need to acquire French paintings became decisive. Indeed, the ambition of the forthcoming institution in the Louvre was to provide a complete gathering of international artistic production, in which the French School was to occupy a prominent place. However, the King's collection was scarce in French paintings. In this context, the purchasing policy for the future museum, destined for the Grande Galerie of the Louvre, was essentially oriented towards the opportunity to fill in the gaps of the royal collection.⁸



FIGURE 4 EUSTACHE LE SUEUR, *L'AMOUR, RÉPRIMANDÉ PAR SA MÈRE, SE REFUGIE DANS LES BRAS DE CERES*, 1646-1647, HUILE SUR BOIS, 97 x 250 CM, RF 1988-47 PARIS, MUSEE DU LOUVRE. © RMN.

⁷ Cabinet des Tableaux du Roi à Paris et à Versailles, 16 septembre 1773, Paris, AN, O1 1912.2-99.

⁸ Paris, AN, O1 1914.2-249. See also *ibid* and GUIFFREY, J., "Lettres et documents sur l'acquisition des tableaux d'Eustache Le Sueur", *Nouvelles Archives de l'Art Français*, Paris, 1877, pp. 274-362 ; and MACCELLAN, A., "Nationalism and the Origins of the Museum in France", *Studies in the History of Art*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1996, pp. 29-39.

The paintings of Le Sueur still constitute today an important part of the French collection in the Musée du Louvre (fig. 4). As we can see on this picture, the decorative paintings transposed and inserted into the museum undergo a remarkable transformation in their aspect and function. It becomes clear from this example that the detaching, moving and framing of the object changes its function and purpose. This movement of deconstruction/reconstruction creates a new object with unique properties, and completes the transformation of paintings into *musealia*. The initial decorative value of these paintings tends to decrease, and their use is reformulated in the museum context, where they played a role in a historiographical construction. Integrated into the French section of the future institution, these paintings became elements of a patriotic rhetoric, and were meant to demonstrate equality – if not superiority – of the National School.

Poussin Uncutted

New manipulations made on paintings around 1775 – or, in the second case study, precisely the absence of manipulation – allows us to capture the various changes undergone by certain objects. If physical alterations transform them, their new functions and new identities also change the potential manipulation. After 1775, new norms can be observed in the work of artists and restorers. During this period, fewer cuts on paintings are documented. If more than a third of the King's paintings used to be cut, the process seems to stop in a very obvious and radical way at this time. One can observe this phenomenon quite precisely with a specific case-study. In 1778, le Comte d'Angiviller, the Director of the King's Buildings, proposed to change the dimensions of a painting by the French painter from the 17th Century Nicolas Poussin. The piece had been exposed in the Luxembourg Gallery and was to be returned to Versailles. Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre, the King's first Painter, wrote to d'Angiviller that, even if he had wanted to cut the painting, the manipulation seemed inappropriate to him and overall impossible. Traditionally, in the first half of the 18th century, the King of France's paintings were moved in various royal residences and apartments. During these relocations, shapes were often remodeled, cut and adapted to fit their new space. Poussin's painting was to be returned to

Versailles at the closing time of the Luxembourg Gallery, and Pierre agreed to cut it *a priori*. But, after being confronted to the painting, Pierre changed his mind. According to him: "La page est trop remplie pour permettre le moindre retranchement."⁹ The impossibility did not arise from a superior decision, from a theoretical idea or from a deontological order, but through confrontation with the object. Facing the canvas, Pierre felt unable to cut it: it seems as if the painting itself was guiding him.

In addition to this particular case, the number of painting cuts was dramatically decreasing, and in many cases this kind of transformation did not seem possible anymore. I argue that new paradigms can be underlined while studying this change. Indeed, this new difficulty to cut the painting is related to a paradigm shift, connected to the transformation of paintings in a museum's object: if the manipulations on the paintings transformed their identity, as we saw previously with *Le Sueur*, I also would like to suggest with this second example, that their new identity implies new manipulations and new conditions of possibility. By "paradigms", I do not mean a kind of theoretical frame given *a priori*, which determines or explains all manipulations. On the contrary, I have something much more fragile and complex in mind, which is constructed and perpetually renegotiated, verbally but also physically, especially during this kind of interventions and in the presence of the objects.¹⁰

Le Sueur in the Dark

The desire to preserve paintings in a public exhibition space, as it emerged around 1775, changed the status of paintings and transformed the conventions established for restoration: while these painting were adjustable to a location, as any architectural decoration, the museum prohibited certain transformations. This new status allowed and restricted certain transformations, changing "the condition of possibility" for an intervention, as I mentioned before with the example of Poussin. The perception of the object guides its manipulations and

⁹ O1 1914.2-121, Letter from Pierre to the Comte d'Angiviller, April 1778.

¹⁰ On this conception, see LATOUR, B., *Science in Action*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1987.

conservation treatments. But conservation is not only a form of reception: it also happens to be a form of recreation and requalification, with an active effect. In this perspective, restoration is part of a transformation process.

However, if we can observe significant levels like the respect gradually given to the original dimensions of the artwork, these changes do not amount to a linear evolution. The transformation of a private mural decorative painting in a musealia is indeed reversible, as shown by the example of the ceiling painted by Le Sueur for the *Cabinet of the Muses*. In 1845, this painting, originally taken from the *Cabinet des Muses* in the Hotel Lambert, later transported to the Louvre, was relocated into the apartments of the Duke de Nemours. It was thus to be returned to a private space and re-exhibited as a painted ceiling. In this context, it was to be adapted to its new location and enlarged. Four half-moons were added to form an oval adapted to the new location. In 1851, the curator of the Louvre, Frédéric Villot, deplored these manipulations:

"Tous ces tableaux ont fait constamment partie de la galerie jusqu'en 1845, époque à laquelle on les place dans les appartements qu'on disposait aux Tuileries pour M le duc de Nemour. Ils furent alors considérés comme de simples décorations (...) Le *Phaéton demandant à conduire le char du soleil*, par Le Sueur, fut placé dans le plafond du salon et on y ajouta des morceaux de chaque côté de manière à le rendre ovale du carré qu'il était. Enfin, les muses de Le Sueur, furent encastrées dans la muraille d'un petit cabinet obscur, sans fenêtre, éclairée par une lampe, et pour les fixer on perça dans la peinture exécutée sur panneau des trous que l'on y voit encore. "¹¹

The return of this painting in a private space implied new material transformations. But this new status was also constructed by various manipulations. Material transformation changes the symbolic identity of these paintings, as well as its legal condition - from private to public space, or, under the Old Regime, from the property of the Crown to the personal ownership of Monsieur, etc. These mutations are induced and simultaneously permitted by restorations. In that sense, the stage of

¹¹ Paris, AMN, P1, 1851, 23 juillet, note from Villot to Nieuwerberke.

the museum is both a consequence and an impulse that makes the paintings more than an adjustable ornamental element, but an independent object, mainly for public contemplation.

Ruben's Furniture



FIGURE 5 FRONT PAGE AND PORTRAIT OF RUBENS IN *LA GALERIE DU PALAIS DU LUXEMBOURG PEINTE PAR RUBENS ET DESSINEE PAR NATTIER*, PARIS, 1710, GENEVE, BIBLIOTHEQUE DE GENEVE. © N. ETIENNE.

Another exchange of letters may be interesting to understand how the identity of paintings changes around 1775: a correspondence between Cromot du Bourg, the Superintendent of Monsieur, the King's Brother, and d'Angiviller. Though it is not relevant to the detachment of frescoes but simply to the removal of Rubens paintings from the Palais du Luxembourg. These paintings were created by Rubens for Marie de Médicis around 1625, and, if not painted directly on the walls, were created for this specific space. In 1778, the Luxembourg Palace, including the Palace's furniture, was given by the King to "Monsieur". In May 1780, Cromot du Bourg wrote to d'Angiviller how utterly shocked he was to see that the Director would withdraw "the little goods and paintings which serve as furniture" from

the palace. D'Angiviller promptly responded that he was not removing the furniture from the Palace: the only objects he was taking were the Kings' paintings, as well as Rubens' pieces. The discussion then moved on to the status of these particular paintings. Were they part of the royal collection, ready to be exhibited in the Louvre, according to d'Angiviller's wish? Were they part of the palace's furniture, as Cromot

du Bourg argued, because they were especially painted for that place? What was their identity?

The answer to these questions is probably less important than the discussion itself. It clearly shows how material transformations or removals of a painting affect their identity, as well as their aesthetic, political and legal requalification. Legal conditions are crucial at this point: by giving the paintings to his brother, the King removes the paintings from the Crown's collection, and in a way, from the Old Regime public space. This discussion, and the will of d'Angiviller to remove Rubens's paintings and to expose them in the future exhibition space, points out the change of paradigm mentioned before. For d'Angiviller and the King, these paintings had to stay in the Crown's Collection, to be exhibited in the future museum and to be studied by contemporary painters to stimulate the French School.

In 1766, after the first restoration campaign of these paintings, Cochin suggested an intensification of the visits, previously restricted to two public days, to encourage the study of Rubens. His study of color was the touchstone of his reflection:

"Il serait sans doute extrêmement à souhaiter que nos élèves un peu avancés puissent faire quelques Etudes d'après les ouvrages d'un coloriste aussi célèbre que Rubens, d'autant plus que toutes les autres Ecoles accordent aussi à la nôtre la supériorité dans le dessin, mais elle lui conteste l'Excellence dans le coloris. Il est à croire que si, de Bonne heure, nos jeunes gens prenaient là quelque teintures d'un coloris vigoureux, cela aiderait à en former quelques-uns à cette partie brillante de l'art."¹²

The choice of restored works reflects the prerogatives of those who accomplish them. Indeed, the Rubens Gallery combined a pedagogical function expected from a public exhibition, with the specific role played by the Flemish master in contemporary art debates.¹³ A particular emphasis was put on the study of Rubens in the resurrection program

¹² Paris, AN, O1 1911. 1-167.

¹³ MAËS, G., "La réception de Rubens en France au 18^e siècle : quelques jalons", in HECK, M.-C. (ed.), *Le rubénisme en Europe aux 17^e et 18^e siècles*, Turnhout, éd. Brepols, 2005, pp. 55-67.

of the French School. This may be related to certain *topoi* in 17th and 18th Centuries art criticism: the perfect color of Rubens, and the lack of competence from French painters in this specific area. In his *Dialogue sur le coloris* (1699), De Piles had already stated that the best advice he could give to artists who wanted to perfect the color of their art was to go every week in the Luxembourg to study the Rubens Gallery.¹⁴ In 1748, the author of the "Lettre sur la peinture, sculpture et l'architecture à M ***" formulated a series of proposals to improve the French School: he suggested that the royal collection be opened to the public and then underlined the necessity for young painters to study the color of paintings. The same year, an anonymous text reaffirmed the importance of Rubens for the young French painters.¹⁵ As a result, to improve the quality of the French School, the royal administration had to make these paintings accessible as well as visible.

Princes of Painters

As the examples below may suggest, the royal administration treated some paintings very carefully during the second half of the 18th Century. The paintings of Le Sueur were often manipulated around 1775. The only other artist whose works were equally restored and protected was Raphael. Together, their artworks represented two thirds of manipulated paintings between 1775 and 1780. During 1777, for instance, Hacquin transported 28 paintings of Le Sueur in the Louvre to restore them.¹⁶ This eagerness was part of the exhibition policy for the forthcoming museum, which aims to give a prominent place to the French School and to stimulate contemporary local production. Furthermore, Le Sueur was not a French painter like the others in this context: as he had never traveled to Italy, Le Sueur was the ideal

¹⁴ "Le meilleur conseil que j'aurais à donner aux peintres (...) ce serait de voir pendant un an, tous les huit jours une fois, la galerie du Luxembourg, de quitter toute chose et de ne rien épargner pour cela. Ce jour serait sans doute le plus utilement employé de la semaine. Rubens est ce me semble celui de tous les peintres qui a rendu le chemin qui conduit au coloris plus facile et plus débarrassé", DE PILES, R., *Dialogue sur le coloris*, Paris, 1699 (1673), p. 58.

¹⁵ *Observations sur les arts, Et sur quelques morceaux de Peinture & de sculpture, exposés au Louvre en 1748*, Leyde Chez Elias Luzac Junior, p. 48.

¹⁶ Paris, AN, O1 1922 A1-9.

example to demonstrate the excellence of French artists who never went to Rome.

Indeed, the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* undergoes a significant reformulation during the second half of the 18th Century. It became less of a time issue than a geographical one. Which is the best School? The Italian or the French one? The French writer Boyer d'Argens proposed a peaceful resolution of this question. In a book published in 1752, then corrected and expanded in 1768, the Marquis d'Argens depreciated the attractiveness of Italy and underlined the opportunity to study Raphael and Rubens in the royal collection in Paris. According to d'Argens, France was indeed able to produce gifted artists without the help of Italy: Le Sueur became an example.¹⁷ But the author wanted to be accommodating, arguing that French artists were just as good as Italian painters.¹⁸ He built his text on a series of comparisons and equivalences between French and Italian artists: Michelangelo vs. Le Brun, Tintoretto vs. Van Loo... The figure of Le Sueur was the first to be mentioned and was compared to Raphael. At that point, d'Argens brought up a familiar comparison in 18th Century art criticism and described Le Sueur as "le Raphael français." Priority given to the paintings of Raphael, the "Prince of Painters", as well as those of Le Sueur, presented by the Marquis d'Argens Boyer as its French equivalent, was reinforced by the museum project that d'Angiviller wished to inaugurate before the Revolution. Likewise, the Rubens Gallery included a set of paintings of considerable importance: it was essential that they be well conserved and cleaned in order to be studied by painters. The double signification of the word "restoration" in French is here meaningful, describing the process of updating pictures as well as the idea of resurrection of the French School. This logic goes on after the Revolution. The term "regeneration" is then often used to describe the transformation of the whole French society, which must be purified - but also to describe the process of paintings transformation. Just as the French word "restoration", "regeneration"

¹⁷ "[N]os meilleurs artistes, à l'exception de deux ou trois, ne furent pas à Rome". (De Boyers d'Argens, Jean-Baptiste, *Examen critique des différentes écoles de peinture*, 1752 [1752], Genève, Minkoff Reprints, p. 28.

¹⁸ "La France ayant eu d'aussi grands peintres que l'Italie, et en aussi grand nombre", *ibid.*, p. 27.

implies a work done in the present on ancient pieces that have a connection to the future.

Material Art History

The history of conservation reflects social, political and esthetical choices and issues. These manipulations actively participate in the construction of a corpus of canonical works. Art history is not only written in the 18th century, but also constructed – by conservation techniques, material transformation, reconstruction and reconfiguration of objects. Indeed, around 1775, the historiographical or juridical issues are not only addressed in an abstract way, in contemporary writings about art and philosophy, but may be understood through specific examples, allowing to identify the negotiations surrounding certain objects. The function of a painting seems to be defined less by its intrinsic properties than by the way it changes, and by the way this change is perceived and evaluated. Movements, cuts, material transformations and change of legal status follow one another, and the object can assume different identities and qualities during its life. Its definition is the result of a process, temporary and reversible, which does not exhaust all its meanings and potential functions.¹⁹

The organic metaphor of the 19th century (John Ruskin), which suggest that the artwork lives, grows and dies as a living being – often mentioned in the discourses on restoration – proceeds not simply from a confusion related to an anthropomorphic understanding of the object, but rather allows us to understand that the artworks are subject to a process of physical and symbolic reconfiguration, non-linear as well as sometimes reversible. Consumption Studies and Anthropology have pointed out how the function of an object as a commodity may only

¹⁹ HEINICH, N., "Les objets-personnes: fétiches, reliques et œuvres d'art", *Sociologie de l'art*, n° 6, 1993, pp. 25-55 ; BONNOT, T., *La vie des objets*, Paris, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2002 ; JULIEN M.-P. et ROSSELIN, C., *La culture matérielle*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005, "Les objets au musée", pp. 31-44.

embody a moment of its existence.²⁰ Taking advantage of a history of Consumption, where the impermanence of its object is conceived, one can address artworks as artifacts, whose existence and function are frequently renegotiated. If artworks are transformed through restoration and manipulation, and if the technical innovations in the field encourage a redefining of their function, these redefinitions remain only a step in the life of things.

While addressing the artwork as a *continuum*, i.e. as a material object undergoing perpetual transformations, this paper focused on the material existence of such objects in time rather than on the context in which they were created or on how they were interpreted. The history of restoration shows that paintings don't have a fixed identity, but rather that their function and status depends on a long series of manipulations and contexts. The identity of several paintings - such as the Rubens of the Luxembourg or the paintings of Le Sueur from the Hotel Lambert - is discussed and empirically questioned. Manipulations, such as moving or cutting, as well as controversies or debates related to these interventions; invite different actors, - restorers but also philosophers and polemicists - to discuss their identity. These debates, stimulated by a change in the materiality of artworks, allow us to approach the negotiations surrounding the definition of what a single object is, offering an interesting methodological approach to these broader questions. This focus on continuous modification allowed me to connect the distinction between the creation and the reception of artworks, while acknowledging the constant refashioning of these objects. Taking case-studies in the 18th Century in Paris, I demonstrated that restoration simultaneously reveals and creates a relation to the past: the way in which we would like to see a painting expresses, among other things, the relation we establish between the object and the past. Thus, by allowing to identify a corpus of objects that are updated to survive and to influence the present, restoration contributes to the creation of heritage.²¹

²⁰ APPADURAI, A., "INTRODUCTION: Commodities and the Politics of Value", dans APPADURAI, A. (dir.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in cultural Perspective*, 1989, pp. 3-63.

²¹ KIRSCHENBLATT-GIMBLETT, B., *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

HOW RUSSIA MET ITALY IN ESTONIA. VIKTOR FILATOV, CESARE BRANDI AND THE CONSERVATION OF MEDIEVAL MURALS IN CHURCHES ON THE ISLAND OF SAAREMAA, BY ANNELI RANDLA AND HILKKA HIIOP

Viktor Filatov was a Soviet Russian conservator who, in spite of the 'Iron Curtain', managed to study and apply the modern, then, conservation methodology developed in Italy by Cesare Brandi. These innovative methods were employed in the conservation of the medieval murals in churches in Estonia. The controversial results of these conservation projects have created a conflict between the principle of reversibility and the wish to historicise the outcomes of the reconstruction. The aim of the article is to analyse the conservation process and the later perception which led to this shift in attitudes.

Introduction

Mid-20th century was a time of significant changes in conservation philosophy, methodology and practice. In Italy, the school of Cesare Brandi evolved after the foundation of the *Istituto Centrale del Restauro* in 1939, and found wider international recognition after 1963, when Brandi's *Teoria del restauro* was published.



FIGURE 1 VIKTOR FILATOV UNCOVERING MURALS IN THE VALJALA CHURCH IN 1971. PHOTO VILLEM RAAM.

Although the Soviet Union was behind 'the Iron Curtain', in the 1960s Western European expert information reached the central conservation institutions in Moscow. The contacts were not regular, but for a while attending conferences abroad and visits of foreign specialists were possible.

One of the people who not only knew, but also employed, the methodology developed in Italy, was the Soviet Russian conservator Viktor Filatov. The aim of this article is to analyse the methods, results and reception of the important conservation projects led by him on the medieval

wall paintings in the churches of Valjala, Muhu and Kaarma, on the island of Saaremaa in Estonia in the early 1970s (fig. 1).

This is an academically understudied topic because of the controversial results of the conservation work. However, the discoveries and the methodology chosen have most lastingly influenced the perception of these murals – and all medieval wall paintings – in the Estonian art historical discourse, creating a conflict between the principle of reversibility of conservation and the wish to historicise the outcome of the restoration.

The murals before conservation

The medieval churches on the island of Saaremaa and on the western coast of Estonia form a distinct architectural group. They date from the 13th century and are thus among the earliest stone churches built in Estonia. Most of them consist of square chancels and slightly wider and higher longitudinal naves. Each church has high rib vaults, one in the chancel and two or three in the nave. Their architecture is characterised by clear geometrical forms and sparse, but well-proportioned carved elements, such as portals, window tracery and moulded cornices. This architecture is mainly influenced by churches on Gotland and in Westphalia, but also displays some features characteristic to the Cistercian Order.

The interior decoration of these churches is comprised of such carved details as moulded ribs, bosses, corbels, capitals, stone altars etc., murals and other painted details, and furnishings. A lot of the original decorations have been lost over time; the murals were whitewashed after the Reformation.

The first wall paintings were rediscovered in 1913 in the churches of Muhu and Karja on Saaremaa. Large figures in architectural settings were uncovered in the chancel of the Muhu church and a painted tracery window was found on the northern wall in the Karja church. More finds and the first conservation work followed in the 1920s in the churches of Karja and Ridala on the western coast. Figures similar to those in Muhu were uncovered in the Ridala church.

By the mid-1960s, traces of further paintings had been recorded in about a dozen churches and plans for their uncovering and

conservation emerged.

Viktor Filatov and Italian conservators

Conservators were not educated in Estonia during the post-WWII period, and those working in the field during Soviet times had either studied in Leningrad and Moscow or were trained by colleagues in workshops. Therefore, when more complicated work was planned, specialists were invited from conservation centres in Moscow or Leningrad. Viktor Filatov had conserved the murals in Lohu manor in Estonia in the mid-1960s and was asked by the Soviet Estonian Ministry of Culture to deal with the important medieval murals in the churches on Saaremaa.

Viktor Filatov (1918–2009), the leading expert at the Moscow State Artistic Restoration Central Workshop, was educated as an art historian and conservator in Moscow and became one of the leading specialists in the restoration of wall paintings in the Soviet Union in the 1960s. He had contacts through ICOM with conservators in Italy and France, was well aware of the latest achievements in the conservation technology of southern Europe and was familiar with the restoration theory of Cesare Brandi. He was behind the translation into Russian and publication of articles on the techniques and restoration methods of murals by Paul Philippot and Paolo Mora in 1969.¹ Constanza Mora, the daughter of the renowned conservators of wall paintings, Paolo and Laura Mora recalled the repeated visits of her parents to Moscow. The personal archive of Moras contains numerous references to Filatov, copies and translations into Italian of his articles.²

Filatov was an internationally renowned and experienced professional whose numerous articles were published both in the Soviet Union and in specialist literature abroad.³ His scope of expertise ranged from bold

¹Пол Филиппо, 'Основные исторические этапы техники стеной живописи.' In: *Сообщения ВЦНИЛКР* 1969, приложение 3, pp. 3ff; Пол Филиппо, Паоло Мора, 'Техника и консервация стеной живописи.' In: *Сообщения ВЦНИЛКР* 1969, приложение 4, pp. 6–24.

² Constanza Mora, interview by Hilka Hiiop on May 18th, 2009.

³ See for instance: V. Filatov, A. Deanovic, K. Nikolesko, G. Zidaru, B. Marconi, 'Le techniques de la peinture de chevalet dans les pays slaves et en Roumanie Étude de la couche picturale.' In: *5th Joint Meeting of the ICOM Committee for Museum Laboratories and of the Sub-committee for*

art historical interpretations to innovative technical solutions in conservation, in his restoration projects from Samarkand to Saaremaa and from Moscow to Novgorod. However, in the mid-1970s he was subjected to serious criticism. In his later career, he was more concerned with the restoration of icons.

Conservation works in Estonia

The work on the churches in Valjala, Muhu and Kaarma took place from 1969 to 1976. The newly discovered murals in Valjala depicted a row of six badly damaged figures under canopies; in Muhu, a large-scale figurative composition was combined with architectural and ornamental paintings, and in Kaarma fragments of different figurative scenes surrounded the traces of a large painted rose window.⁴

In Estonia, Filatov worked together with the chemist Antonina Ivanova, likewise from the Moscow State Artistic Restoration Central Workshop. Ivanova was responsible for the technical solutions, and Filatov for the overall concept and conservation methods for the work and their execution.

Large-scale work was carried out under their supervision, mostly by unqualified young Estonian artists and art historians, some of whom later became important personalities in Estonian cultural life, including Professor Juhan Maiste, who founded the Department of Conservation at the Estonian Academy of Arts, and Sirje Helme, who became the director of the Art Museum of Estonia.

the Care of Paintings. Washington: s l, 1965, pp. 65/9/16–25; V. V. Filatov, 'Principal Stages of the Restoration of Monumental Painting in Architectural Monuments of the RSFSR.' In: *ICOM Committee for Conservation. 4th Triennial Meeting, Venice, 13–18 October 1975*. Preprints. Paris: ICOM, 1975, pp. 75/12/11-1–75/12/11-8; V. V. Filatov, V. N. Bobkov, 'Recent Research of Church Painting of 1408 in the Cathedral of the Assumption at Vladimir in Ultra-violet Rays.' In: *ICOM Committee for Conservation. 5th Triennial Meeting, Zagreb, 1–8 Oct. 1978*. Preprints. Paris: ICOM, 1978, pp. 78/15/11/1–78/15/11/8.

⁴ For art historical analysis of the murals see Villem Raam, 'Valjala seinamaalidest, nende vanusest ja päritolust.' In: *Kunst* 1986, no 1 (68), pp. 59–65; Villem Raam, 'Ühest vähetuntud kunstilli Muhu saarel.' In: *Kunst* 1984, no 2 (64), pp. 50–59; Kersti Markus, Tiina-Mall Kreem, *Kaarma kirik*. Tallinn: Muinsuska itseamet, 2003, pp. 78–85.

The technical solution and concept of the restoration work led by Filatov can be reconstructed in detail from different sources: the diaries of the works in Muhu, Kaarma and Valjala churches⁵ and published articles on projects where the same methodology was used⁶. In addition, the memories of the members of the conservation team provide important insights into the work.⁷ The official final report was either never completed or has gone missing. The preliminary report on the Muhu church contains some references to the work done in Kaarma and Valjala⁸.

Technical conservation

The previously unknown murals in the Valjala and Kaarma churches and the wall paintings in the Muhu church, which had been discovered in 1913 and were later whitewashed, were exposed mechanically, and fixed locally with polyvinyl acetate (PVA) dispersion glues. The surfaces were repeatedly impregnated with organo-silicate resins, in an effort to strengthen the layers of plaster and paint, and to make the surfaces water-repellent.

The development of organo-silicate resins started in the State Artistic-Scientific Restoration Research Laboratory in Moscow in the early 1960s and the resins were tested on numerous monuments all over the

⁵ *Kunstimälestised Kingissepa raj. Muhu kirikus*. Archives of the Department of Registry of the National Heritage Board (hereafter MKAVA), toimik 4-5/11 II köide, no pagination; *Kaarma kiriku seinamaalide (obj.744) restaureerimis-dokumentatsioon a. 1970–1976*. MKAVA, toimik 4-5/6 II köide, no pagination; *Valjala kirikus teostatud interjööri restaureerimise dokumentatsioon 1972–1976.a*. MKAVA, toimik 4-5/16 I ja II köide, no pagination; *Muhu kirik. Muhu kiriku restaureerimistööde päevik 1971.–1973. a*. Archives of the Estonian National Library, f 20, n 1, s 86.

⁶ А. В. Иванова, О. В. Лелекова, В. В. Филатов, 'Подбор материалов и разработка методов укрепления росписи стен мавзолея Гур-Эмир.' In: *Сообщения ВЦНИЛКР* 1968, n 21, pp. 43–54; В. В. Филатов, 'Реставрация стенной живописи художника Готлиба Вельте.' In: *Сообщения ВЦНИЛКР* 1970, n 26, pp. 177–186.; В. В. Филатов, 'О материалах для укрепления красочного слоя древнерусской монументальной живописи.' In: *Художественное наследие* 1975, n. 1(31), pp. 34–50.

⁷ Interviews with Andrei and Maria Pisk and with Juhan Maiste. A. and M. Pisk, interview by Hilkka Hiiop and Kais Matteus on February 27th, 2009. J. Maiste, interview by Hilkka Hiiop on March 5th, 2009.

⁸ *Muhu kirik. Restaureerimise ja konserveerimise töödest aastetest 1970–1973*. Archives of the National Heritage Board (hereafter MKA), s A-504, no pagination.

Soviet Union.⁹ The same method was experimentally used for the conservation of paintings on canvas to make them more water-repellent and thus less prone to damage in the conditions of fluctuating indoor climatic conditions.¹⁰

In the 1960s, all of Europe believed in progress and the seemingly unlimited possibilities offered by scientific achievements and synthetic materials, which among other things promised to solve all preservation problems. Filatov's work corresponded well with this mentality. In specialized conservation labs, including the ones in the Soviet Union, ever more synthetic conservation media were worked out.

The results of this enthusiasm occasionally became evident only years or decades later, when some of the lab-tested substances proved unsuitable for the conservation of historical legacy because of the existing micro-climatic circumstances and the behaviour of these new materials over longer periods of time.

In any case, the negative results in Saaremaa became evident already during the restoration work. Massive crystallisation of salts in newly restored areas occurred both in the Muhu and Kaarma churches, as witnessed by the members of the conservation team: 'The next year [1971], when we came there [Muhu], we were speechless at what had happened. /.../ [The walls] were covered with a white cotton-like substance /.../ on the [wall] surface were salts, which had protruded through plaster, through the murals...'¹¹ The situation was similar in Kaarma.¹²

Filatov can be partially blamed for using unsuitable and excess synthetics but, on the other hand, the effectiveness of the conservation work and the impact of the substances were largely due to micro-climatic conditions. The conditions in the Saaremaa churches, however,

⁹ See V. V. Filatov, 'Principal Stages of the Restoration of Monumental Painting in Architectural Monuments of the RSFSR' on this development.

¹⁰ See I. V. Nazarova, E. L. Malachevskaya, L. I. Yashkina, 'Technique of restoring paintings on canvas without lining.' In: *ICOM Committee for Conservation. Triennial Meeting (9th), Dresden, German Democratic Republic, 26–31 August 1990*. Preprints. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1990, pp. 130–132.

¹¹ Interview with A. and M. Pisk.

¹² Diary of the works in Kaarma, entry for October 15th, 1976 (M. Pisk). *Kaarma kiriku seinamaalide (obj.744) restaureerimis-dokumentatsioon a. 1970–1976*. MKAVA, toimik 4-5/6 II köide, no pagination.

were critical when Filatov started and when he finished: in places there were no windows, the roofs leaked, the churches had serious humidity problems, and green algae was everywhere. Thus the gravest mistake made was the uncovering of the murals in such conditions.

Although the methodology used in the three churches was the same, the results varied. The problems in the Muhu church were extreme, in Kaarma somewhat less dramatic and in Valjala relatively modest. On the other hand, the same method was used by Filatov on the murals in the Lohu manor in Estonia in the mid-1960s and these wall paintings are in excellent condition. The difference is due to the indoor climate, which is stable in Lohu manor, but fluctuates greatly in the churches. Why Filatov as an experienced conservator agreed to the uncovering of the murals or whether he paid any attention to it, remains unclear from the sources. In Muhu, the explanation might be in the plans to convert the church into a museum and start architectural conservation parallel to the work on the murals.¹³ In any case, Filatov added to his report a detailed instruction for the maintenance of the murals and the indoor climate of the churches; these were standard guidelines produced in 1966 by the Scientific and Methodological Council of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture of the USSR.¹⁴

In hindsight, the evaluation of the technical restoration methods of Filatov and Ivanova is rather controversial: they have been blamed for destroying the oldest and most valuable paintings in Estonia, but have also been admired for the novelty of their approach on both the technical and theoretical levels.

Treatment of the losses

Filatov's activities were theoretically and conceptually at least as up-to-date as the technical side of the restoration, but in this case in a

¹³ *Muhu kirik*. MKA, s 347, no pagination.

¹⁴ 'Методические указания по содержанию неотапливаемых зданий-памятников архитектуры, имеющих монументальную и станковую живопись, деревянную скульптуру и предметы декоративно-прикладного искусства.' (*Muhu kirik*. MKA, s A-504, no pagination). For a more detailed account of the conservation works, see Hilkka Hiiop, Anneli Randla, 'Eesti kirikute keskaegsete seinamaalingute uurimisest ja restaureerimisest.' In: *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi/Studies on Art and Architecture*, vol. 18, no. 3–4, 2009, pp. 24–32.

positive sense. The manner and method with which the whole process was graphically documented were exemplary. The conditions of the wall paintings before conservation and at all stages of the work were recorded in great detail, on a scale of 1:20; in order to map the preservation rate of the paintings, contact copies of the surviving colour fragments were produced with tracing paper (1:1). Although this documentation has only partly been preserved, it cannot be overestimated as historical source material and as the basis for monitoring the state of the conservation of the murals. In addition, the artistic quality of the drawings is remarkable.

The question of the losses in the murals of Muhu, Kaarma and Valjala was dealt with in line with Cesare Brandi's ideas about the treatment of lacunae:¹⁵ the aim was to achieve distinguishability and reversibility of the reintegration. Behind these decisions was the analysis of values expressed via the aesthetic presentation of the paintings.



FIGURE 2 RETOUCHING OF THE PAINTED ROSE WINDOW IN THE KAARMA CHURCH IN 1973. ABOUT 75% OF THE WINDOW IS RECONSTRUCTED. PHOTO TIIT RANDLA.

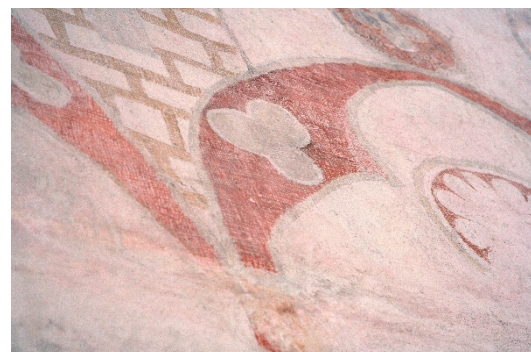


FIGURE 3 CROSS-HATCHED RETOUCHING IN THE MUHU CHURCH. PHOTO MERIKE KALLAS.

¹⁵ See for instance Cesare Brandi, *Theory of Restoration*. Roma: Istituto Centrale per il Restauro, Nardini Editore, 2005, pp. 90–93.

In cases where the evidence was sufficient for reconstruction, the conservator's additions can be clearly differentiated from the original, as tone-lighter pigments and/or cross-hatching or vertical strokes, both derived from the concept of *tratteggio*, were applied (figs. 2, 3). When the reconstruction was hypothetical, a 'neutral retouch' was preferred. To achieve reversibility, the retouching was consciously carried out with a water-based binding medium.

In cases of linear, clearly geometrical or repetitive patterns, Filatov opted for massive reconstructions, since it was possible to recreate the aesthetic unity without compromising the evidence. This was widespread practice at the time. However, the difference lies in the



FIGURE 4 NORTHERN WALL OF THE CHANCEL IN THE MUHU CHURCH. THE AREAS COLOURED IN BLUE ARE MAINLY RECONSTRUCTED. PHOTO AND DRAWING KAIS MATTEUS.



FIGURE 5 DETAIL OF THE MURAL IN THE MUHU CHURCH. THE AREAS COLOURED IN BLUE ARE RECONSTRUCTED. PHOTO AND DRAWING KAIS MATTEUS.

visually distinguishable nature of these reconstructions at a close distance and their reversibility. For instance, in the Kaarma church only about 25% of the painted rose window on the northern wall of the chancel is original, and the rest is painstakingly retouched. In the Muhu church, the architectural and ornamental elements were likewise substantially complemented, but here the conservator's additions were more liberal in design. Thus large areas of the murals are filled with reconstructed paintings (figs. 4, 5).

Reception of the conservation

Since the early 1970s the exposed and reconstructed murals have influenced the wider public's perception, as well as the specialist art historical discourse of medieval art in Estonia. The images and descriptions of the largely reconstructed figures in Muhu have repeatedly been published in both general and academic literature.¹⁶ In spite of the concept and efforts of the conservators discussed above, only rarely has it been mentioned – or perceived – that to a great extent these figures were created by the conservators.¹⁷ Over the last forty years, these images have become an integral part of our understanding of the medieval art of Estonia.¹⁸

Moreover, in most of the discussions on the critical state of the conservation of the murals, the fact that the most deteriorated parts of the paintings were the cross-hatched reconstructions was likewise unnoticed (figs. 6, 7).¹⁹

¹⁶ Including literature for the foreign reader, see for instance: Thea Karin, *Estland. DuMont Kunst- und Landschaftsführer*. Köln: DuMont, 1995, pp. 303–304, Kaur Alttoa, Jurijs Vasiljevs, Jonas Minkevičius, *Estland. Lettland, Litauen*. Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 1992, pp. 19, 329–330, fig. 20. See also the official webpage of Muhu parish <http://www.eelk.ee/~kmuhu/inglise.html>.

¹⁷ 'Partial retouching' is briefly mentioned in one case: Kaur Alttoa, *The Churches on the Island of Saaremaa = Saaremaa kirikud*. Tallinn: Kunst, 2003, pp. 50, figs. pp. 51–53.

¹⁸ See for instance the most recent medieval history of Estonia: *Eesti ajalugu II. Eesti keskaeg*. Ed. by Anti Selart. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli ajaloo ja arheoloogia instituut, 2012, p. 326.

¹⁹ Even the published report of the emergency conservation works in 1994–1997 does not mention the reconstructions. See Mare Tael Mare, Ruth Tuvike, 'Conservation in Muhu Church, Estonia.' In: *Conservation of Mural Paintings*. Stockholm: National Heritage Board, 2001, pp. 61–63.

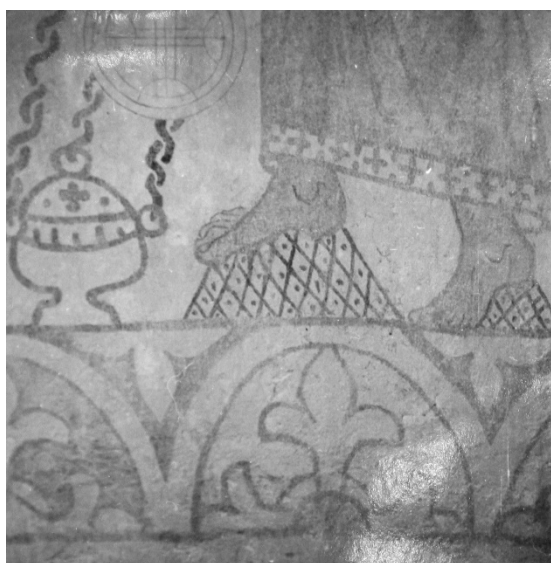


FIGURE 6 DETAIL OF THE MURAL IN MUHU CHURCH AFTER THE RESTORATION IN THE 1970s. PHOTO INGE ROSIMANNUS.



FIGURE 7 THE SAME DETAIL IN 2007. PHOTO MART VILJUS.

Therefore, the reconstructions have started to 'live their own life' and their removal for technical or other methodological reasons would cause serious contradictions between the public's expectations and conservation principles. This situation is not unique to Estonia, of course. It is sufficient to mention the debates around Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*.

One of the main methodological principles of Cesare Brandi's conservation theory is reversibility of conservation. Although technically it is neither always achievable²⁰ nor advisable, it is still a valid concept, especially in more subjective phases of conservation based on value judgements (even if these have been subject to critical assessment). The aesthetic presentation of the work of art is definitely among these. Filatov stressed both methodological and technical reversibility and made conservation decisions accordingly when critically analysing the method of retouching (whether to use 'neutral' retouching or full reconstruction of images) and choosing a reversible medium for retouching (water soluble paint). The main idea behind this

²⁰ See for instance *Reversibility – does it exist?* Ed. by Andrew Oddy. London: British Museum, 1999.

principle is to enable the reversing of the subjective decisions of the given era and thus facilitating reinterpretation by the future generations of conservators.

On the other hand, at a certain point in time every restoration becomes a part of the history of the work of art and should be treated as a testimony to its fate. In such a situation, the conservation layer is treated according to the same rules as the original work of art. One might draw a parallel with Article 11 of the Venice Charter, which declares 'the valid contributions of all periods' worthy of respect. Conservation history has become a discipline of its own and has re-evaluated, for example, the once despised 19th-century reconstructions of medieval murals²¹ or the frescoes of the Mazzatosta Chapel in Viterbo as the first examples of *tratteggio*.²² However, making eternal the conservation which was intentionally made to be reversible, sounds like a contradiction in terms.

In the case of the murals conserved by Filatov in Muhu, Kaarma and Valjala, the attitudes in specialist circles have likewise changed from completely negative to more neutral, and today these works have become a more or less acknowledged phase in Estonian conservation history.²³ The fact that the reconstructions are so extensive and their removal would leave only 'bare walls' behind has contributed to this change in approach.

However, an unsolved question remains: how to raise the awareness of both the general public and art historians to recognise the difference

²¹ See for instance Isabelle Brajer, 'Dilemmas in the restoration of wall paintings: conflicts between ethics, aesthetics, functions and values illustrated by examples from Denmark.' In: *Die Kunst der Restaurierung*. ICOMOS. Hefte des deutschen Nationalkomitees 40. Hrsg. v. Ursula Schädler-Saub. München: ICOMOS, 2005, pp. 122–140.

²² Ursula Schädler-Saub, 'Teoria e metodologia del restauro. Italian contributions to conservation in theory and practice.' In: *Conservation and Preservation. Interactions between Theory and Practice. In memoriam Alois Riegl (1858-1905)*. Proceedings of the International Conference of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee for the Theory and the Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration. 23-27 April 2008 (Vienna, Austria). Ed. Michael S. Falser, Wilfried Lipp, Andrej Tomaszewski. Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2010. p. 85.

²³ In 2011, Kais Matteus discussed this change in her MA dissertation: Kais Matteus, *Eesti kirikute keskaegsete seinamaalingute uurimise ja restaureerimise ajalugu ning tulevikuperspektiiv*. MA dissertation presented at the Department of Conservation of the Estonian Academy of Arts 2011. Supervised by Hilkka Hiiop, Anneli Randla.

between the original paintings and the historical reconstructions.

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Conclusion

The conservation work on the medieval murals in the churches of Muhu, Kaarma and Valjala in the early 1970s led by Viktor Filatov were carried out according to the innovative technical and methodological principles characteristic of the conservation practice in Italy at the time. The technical solution has proved unsuitable in the unstable indoor climate of the churches, and the murals have required repeated restoration. The aesthetic presentation of the works of art in a distinguishable and reversible way was likewise novel and has had a far better fate.

However, the conscious choice of reversible retouching methods (thus allowing the reinterpretation of the murals) has become 'irreversible' due to the values, which the reconstructions have acquired over the last forty years.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

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CFP: "Histories of museology", Art History Supplement, May 2013

"Histories of museology"

Art History Supplement, Issue 3.3, May 2013

Submission deadline: April 15, 2013

Latest technological developments and advances enable us to reconstruct up to some point previous exhibitions and make them available to a global audience for pleasure or research. Such endeavours would include the recent project of Art Institute of Chicago "Historic Exhibitions" celebrating the 100th anniversary of the *International Exhibition of Modern Art*, or else the Armory Show of 1913, the first large exhibition of modern art in America, organised by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors (<http://extras.artic.edu/armoryshow>). The University of Virginia, for instance, had also previously uploaded a website dedicated to the Armory Show (*Welcome to the 1913 Armory Show*, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MUSEUM/Armory/armoryshow.html>). Google Art Project (<http://www.googleartproject.com/>) would also belong to this category in few years, unless updated.

In this forthcoming issue of *Art History Supplement*, vol. 3, no. 3, "Histories of museology", based on concrete examples, papers are sought examining the theoretical dimensions and research potentialities of such projects from the perspective of art history and museology; apart from art criticism or histories of reception initiatives. Further, what does it mean for a museum institution an online exhibition or an online audience, in terms of curating, communication policy or economic strategy? Is online, hence digital, curating different from web design? What could be the impact to museum studies, in general, the existence of two simultaneous versions of the same exhibition (the one in the natural exhibition space of a "museum" and the other "in vitro", in the digital world)? By "museum studies" I refer

to the several disciplines found under the umbrella term of museology, ex., history of museums, curating, museum architectural design, museum communication (aka museum education), museum or heritage management, etc.



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